

teaching method

BABILONIA is specialized in the field of teaching Italian as a second language. We have been teaching Italian in Taormina, Sicily since 1992. We work with a friendly team of highly qualified and experienced teachers, coordinated by the Director of Studies. The class sizes, with an average of 6-8 and a maximum of 10 students of the same level per class, make for an interactive and fast learning experience.

We do not limit our goals to the teaching of Italian only, because it is our belief that a student learning a language in an efficient way also needs to understand the cultural background of the language. At BABILONIA we help students obtain a deep insight into social and cultural aspects of life in Sicily and Italy, both past and present.

Our Italian language course programs have been developed from a communicative based approach and focuses on the four language abilities (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Our **first goal is communication**, both oral and written.

Our reference teaching methodology is communicativism but not in its extreme consequences (read Krashen). We do think that language analyses is also important. For these reasons we divide our standard course in two parts: **"Language Analyses"** and **"Communicative Tasks"**.

The **"Language Analyses"** activities include controlled oral and written production, while the **"Communicative Tasks"** involve listening and reading comprehension and free oral and written activities.

Grammatical structures are presented in order of frequency and relative complexity. Teaching material is always introduced in some form of authentic text (newspaper or magazine article, taped dialogue, video-taped situation, letter, short story, etc.). Progress is monitored and all teachers meet weekly to facilitate organization and ensure proper student placement. The instructors rotate weekly to add variety and interest to the group dynamic.

Most of our students take full advantage of the **authentic materials** (selected from the every day life: newspapers, magazines, books, radio, TV, internet, etc) that we use in the classroom and the communicative activities and tasks we employ, which often extend out of the classroom and into the students' free time.

In both the **Language Analyses** and **Communicative Tasks** parts we focus our attention on the 5 language activities: listening, speaking, reading, writing and metalinguistics. As teachers of Italian as foreign language, we believe that our students will "learn and fix" more having a **deductive approach** to the language. Our Italian lessons are always interactive and never teacher focused. We believe in "the class" as a group and therefore we ask our students to do lots of work in pairs, role-plays, dramatisations, etc.

We do believe the **student MUST be the "primadonna" in class**. The teachers' role MUST be "understanding and monitoring" his/her students needs and proposing all those activities conducive to maximise learning in class.

In linguistics, we divide between **"learning"** and **"acquisition"**. Just simplifying, "learning" implies all the activities involving the rational, conscious, analytical activities of our brain; "acquisition" requires the involvement of the subconscious side of our brain. The brain process of knowing a language is made up of 80% "acquisition", 20% "learning".

In fact, a language is not the result of a set of grammar rules. The study of all the rules of a certain language does not bring knowledge of that language, meaning that the only use of the rational, analytical, conscious side of our brain is not sufficient to learn a language. In fact, we all, **as native speakers of our own mother language, have NOT learned our language by reading and analysing sets of grammar rules or through pedantic corrections** (which cause frustration, fears, apprehension, resentment and the child/learner to become clammed up etc). Rather - during childhood - we needed to make our mistakes, to have our mistakes pass without people around continuously correcting us and frustrating our creativity and desire to express ourselves. In fact, what we all needed was a balance between corrections from outside "tutors" and learning through our mistakes.

Correction is one of the activities to be done during a language course, but for sure the whole course cannot be based on corrections. And this is why we do not correct our students in the second half of the lesson ("Communicative Tasks"). What is important here, the aim of this part of the course, is communication, and improving our general ability of communicating and understanding.

That's why our course is divided into 2 parts **"language analyses"** (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and **"communicative tasks"** (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Correction is one of the activities and it relates to the Language Analyses part of our Italian language courses. The goals of all activities in these two parts of the standard course is different. In "Language Analyses" all activities are meant to better understand how our language works. In the second part "Communicative Tasks" all activities aim to improve general understanding and communicative skills through an active use of the language.

However, completion of a particular 4-week course does not guarantee advancement to the next level. **Language learning is not a mechanical endeavour**. It is an academic endeavour which also involves a personal and psychological component. Some students have elected to repeat a particular level or delay advancement by a week or two, so as to continue study and practice of particular structures. Since our Italian language programs are developed by a communicative-based approach, our materials, activities and tasks are quite extensive and it is rare that the student will repeat the same activities, using the same materials. We have designed our program with this in mind.