



The Building Blocks of Italian

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Grammatica oggi di parleremo, della e cioè in italiano frase struttura!

Cosa?!? Cosa stai dicendo??

Ah, sbagliato ho! Di parleremo grammatica oggi, struttura italiano frase e in cioè della!



Did you understand? I bet you didn't, the words were all mixed up!

Oggi parleremo di grammatica, e cioè della struttura della frase in italiano!

Today's topic is the basic structure of sentences in Italian. Together, we'll learn about the building blocks of Italian! If you like what you see, click the subscribe button. We publish a new video every week. Let's begin!

When we launched this channel a little over one year ago, we published a video on how to build basic sentences in Italian. It's been our most successful video so far, and today I'd like to talk a bit more about this fundamental topic of Italian grammar.

What do very different languages like English, Italian, Russian, and Chinese have in common? They share the same basic sentence structure! This is true for most European languages, but also for Hebrew, Thai, Vietnamese, and many others: they are all SVO languages. This means that sentences are usually made up by the sequence **SUBJECT - VERB - OBJECT** - the same building blocks, in the same order.

subject: who or what is doing the action
verb: the action
object: who or what the action is being done to

Let's compare different languages:

English: Adam eats an apple.

Italian: Adamo mangia una mela.

Russian: Адам ест яблоко

Chinese: 亚当吃一个苹果

Now let's see in what ways Italian is different from English and other languages. One of the major features of Italian grammar, and a common cause of grief for those who learn it, is **verb conjugation**, which means that we modify verb endings to communicate more details.

English has verb conjugation, too - for instance, you add an "s" to the third person singular: I eat, she eats. Italian is more specific, though: the ending of a verb tells you not only the mood and tense (for example, future simple), but it tells you if the subject is singular or plural, masculine or feminine, and sometimes it even tells you things about the object! This is actually a good thing: in Italian verbs are so full of information that sometimes you don't even need the subject anymore! So our sentence structure can become very simple: VERB - OBJECT! All Romance languages, except French, can leave the subject unexpressed.

Let's break down a sentence to explain this concept.

"Io leggo un libro": "Io" is the pronoun I, and it's the subject. "un libro" is a book, the object. But how can we translate "leggo" into English? "leggo" means "I read". When I see "leggo" I already know that the subject is the first person singular, io, I, so I don't really need to say it: I can drop the subject. This is why a native Italian speaker would probably say "Leggo un libro", just like that, and nobody would say "What? Who? Who's reading a book?"

English speakers, on the other hand, tend to use subject pronouns a lot when speaking Italian.

Let's read six sentences, one for each person:

Io apro la finestra

Tu leggi il giornale

Lei beve un caffè

Noi recitiamo una poesia

Voi preparate la cena

Loro guardano la TV

Now let's drop all subject pronouns. These six sentences are very natural in Italian:

Apro la finestra

Leggi il giornale

Beve un caffè

Recitiamo una poesia

Preparate la cena

Guardano la TV

Compare:

Oggi finisco presto. Se vuoi possiamo pranzare insieme.

Today I get off early. If you want we can have lunch together.

There are three subject pronouns in this English sentence - I, you, we - and not even one in Italian. And yet both sentences are perfectly clear! Of course we use subjects too when we need to specify who or what is doing something, or for emphasis, or contrast.

So, we got rid of subject pronouns. But there are more good news: in Italian we don't need to change the sentence structure, the order of our building blocks, to form questions.

QUESTIONS in Italian are much easier than in English: the sentence is exactly the same, you just need to raise your tone at the end. Compare:

Laura guida la macchina. - Laura drives the car.

Laura guida la macchina? - Does Laura drive the car?

Other languages also have this characteristic, for example Russian.

Olga guida la macchina. Ольга водит машину. Olga guida la macchina? Ольга водит машину?

Sometimes the tone is all that matters. If I say *Vai a casa?* I'm asking if you are going home. If I say *Vai a casa!* I am ordering you to go home.

This sentence remains the same even if I add a question word at the beginning of the sentence:

Quando vai a casa? - When do you go home?

Come vai a casa? - How do you go home?

This is not always the case, but we won't go into any more detail here. Here's an entire video about questions & question words, have a look!

How do you form **negative sentences**? You just add NON - not, before the verb:

Adamo **non** mangia la mela. - Adam doesn't eat the apple.

Laura **non** guida la macchina. - Laura can't drive.

Now I want to mention two other building blocks of Italian: adjectives and articles.

ARTICLES are very important in Italian. Have you ever noticed that when Italians speak English, they tend to use "the" a lot, even when it's not needed? That's because we use definite articles a lot in Italian, we like to be specific. Like in English, articles are always placed before a noun, be it the subject or the object. We already saw them in our sentences:

Adamo mangia **una** mela - an apple. This is an indefinite article.

Laura guida **la** macchina - the car. Definite article.

Unlike English, Italian has seven definite articles! To use them correctly you have to know a few rules, so I suggest that you have a look at our video on this topic.

Finally, let's talk about **ADJECTIVES**. Adjectives are words like good, bad, beautiful, interesting, and so on, and even if they are not the most important part of a sentence, communication would be very poor without them. The thing that I want to point out is that in Italian adjectives usually follow the word they refer to, while in English it's the other way round. For example:

Adamo mangia una mela **rossa**. - Adam eats a red apple.

Laura guida la macchina **nuova**. - Laura drives the new car.

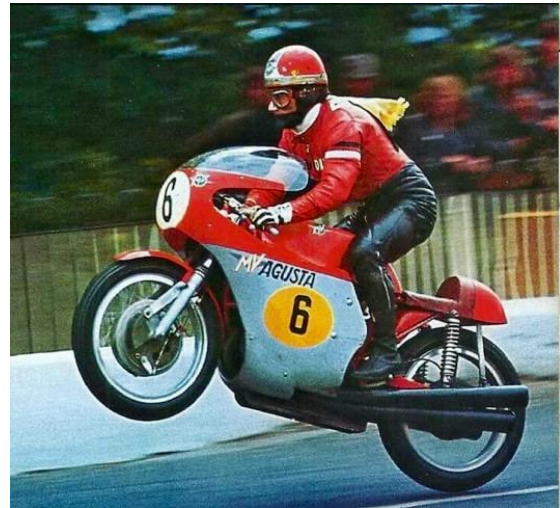
In English articles and adjectives never change: it doesn't matter if we're talking about just one thing or many things: the red car, the red cars. In Italian, instead, we have singular and plural forms of articles and adjectives. We also have masculine and feminine forms, because in Italian all nouns have a gender, and there is no neutral: the car, la macchina, is feminine. And again, we have a video about adjectives.

rossa guida Giacomo
motocicletta una

Now let's put these words in the right order. Can you build the final sentence?

Giacomo guida
una motocicletta rossa

Of course Giacomo here is motorcycle champion Giacomo Agostini, riding a red and silver MV Agusta!




You can find all the videos mentioned above on this channel and on our Website, together with transcripts & exercises. We also have a free PDF with all the basics of Italian Grammar that you can download as a quick reference guide. You can find all the links in the description below.

I really hope that you found this useful. Why don't you write me something about yourself in the comments? Why are you learning Italian? What are your goals? Let me know! And I'll see you next time! Ciao!

Additional content

To say thank you to our patrons, Anna prepared a special PDF with additional content & exercises for this video. If you enjoy our channel and you'd like to give us a hand, have a look at our Patreon page :)

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Links to our videos on these topics:

[Basic Word Order](#) - How to build a sentence in Italian

[Verb Conjugation](#) & First Conjugation

[Masculine or Feminine?](#) - Gender & plural of nouns in Italian

[Definite Articles](#) - Gli articoli determinativi

[How to Ask Questions](#) in Italian

[Italian Adjectives](#): How to get them right!

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