



The verb to say - DIRE

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VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

“E’ ora di dire pane al pane e vino al vino!”

Va bene, bianco o rosso?

“Questa volta te ne dico di tutti i colori!”

“Ma sì, dico per dire”

“Adesso te ne dico quattro!”

Ma sì, lasciamola dire, vuole sempre dire la sua!

Welcome to the fourth episode of our series on the most common verbs of the Italian language; today we'll focus on the verb *dire*, to say: we'll look at its meaning and we'll see other possible alternatives to this generic verb; we'll also learn how to conjugate it and how to use it in several interesting expressions.

Keep watching and subscribe to this channel to show us some love! Ah, devo dire anche: hit the bell icon!

The verb DIRE, needless to say, is one of the most frequent verbs in Italian, that's why it's important to understand how to use it. It means to pronounce, to utter, to express using your voice.

Dire is a transitive verb, which means that it takes a direct object, without prepositions. Obviously, dire is a reporting verb and is therefore commonly used in reported speech. There are several possible structures; if you want to remember well how to use this verb, you can take out your notebook and write them down!

1. **DIRE QUALCOSA A QUALCUNO**, to say something to someone.

Let's now see some examples, and how to manage pronouns with this verb.

Ho detto la verità a Tina. I told Tina the truth. Easy.

Actually, we can also say: *Ho detto a Tina la verità.* The same.

But what if I wanted to say I told **her** the truth?

I have two possibilities:

a. *Ho detto la verità a lei.*

As we have said many times, in Italian pronouns are often used for emphasis, so I would say this sentence only to emphasise that I told the truth to her, and not to someone else. *Ho detto la verità a lei, e non l'ho detta a Mario.* In a more natural and less emphatic way I would say:

b. *Le ho detto la verità.*

Le is the indirect pronoun meaning to her, *a lei*. Why is it placed before and not after the verb, as it would be in English? This is the Way! Great, we love rules, they give us a sense of security, right? Well, indirect pronouns always go before the verb, except when the verb is in the imperative, gerund or infinitive.

Remember: indirect pronouns correspond to the preposition *a* + the pronoun, and they answer the question "to whom?". But the point of today's lesson is not indirect pronouns, so for the sake of practicality we'll see how to use them with DIRE just through examples, to help you remember more easily:

Mi ha detto una bugia.

Ti dico la verità.

Gli ho detto "silenzio!" **Le** ho detto "silenzio!"

Ci dicono cose interessanti.

Vi dico bravi!

Gli dicono la verità. ———> Dicono **loro** la verità. (formal Italian).

We said that when the verb is in the **imperative, gerund or infinitive**, indirect pronouns go after the verb. Important: in this case, **they are attached to the verb** and they form just one word with it:

Voglio dirle la verità. ———> Voglio dire a lei la verità. (the -e of the infinitive is dropped).

Dille la verità. ———> Dì a lei la verità. (the -l of the pronoun is doubled).

Or Dimmi la verità. ———> Di a me la verità. (the -m of the pronoun is doubled).

Dicendole la verità starai meglio. ———> Dicendo a lei la verità starai meglio.

Now that you can master dire with indirect pronouns, you can tell people lots of things!

Another possible structure is:

2. DIRE DI + INFINITIVE

Did you know that in Italian we have present infinitive and past infinitive?

In subordinate clauses, the present infinitive expresses an action which is contemporary or subsequent to the main clause:

Ti dico di andare a casa! I tell you to go home!

Dille di ascoltare con attenzione! Tell her to listen carefully!

The past infinitive indicates an action that precedes that of the main clause:

Dice di avere capito. He says he has understood.

3. DIRE CHE + CLAUSE

Dice che è andata via presto.

Mi hanno detto che torneranno subito.

Paolo le diceva sempre che amava il cinema italiano.

Synonyms of the verb DIRE

Like many generic verbs, the verb DIRE is widely used; however, there are many synonyms that can enrich your vocabulary. Some synonyms belong, if you will, more to the written or otherwise formal language, but we are here to level up, so let's look at some of them:

1. Dire means first of all "to express with the voice" and, in this meaning, a more elegant synonym is **pronunciare**, to pronounce, to utter. The act of saying in itself is emphasised:

*Vado via per sempre – e **pronunciò** queste parole dal profondo del cuore.*

I am going away forever - and he uttered these words from the bottom of his heart.

2. A synonym similar to pronunciare is **proferire**, which is a bit more restricted to the literary language:

*Se ne andò senza **proferire** parola.*

He left without saying a word.

3. In the meaning of saying something by heart, *dire qualcosa a memoria*, **recitare** can be more appropriate:

*I bambini **recitano** una poesia.*

The children recite a poem.

4. **Sussurrare** and **gridare**, to whisper and to shout, are two other interesting synonyms:

*Gabriele gli **sussurrò** all'orecchio alcune parole.*

Gabriele whispered a few words in his ear.

*Chi ha meno ragione **grida** più forte.*

He who is least right shouts loudest.

5. If we want to say something to convince, then we can use verbs such as **affermare**, **asserire** and **sostenere**, to affirm, assert, and support (to maintain, to claim).

*Lui **sostiene** di avere ragione* - He claims to be right.

*L'imputato **asserisce** la propria innocenza.* - The defendant asserts his innocence.

*Lui **afferma** la propria estraneità ai fatti.* - He claimed that he had nothing to do with the facts.

You will certainly have noticed that all the examples belong to a very formal register.

La lista è lunga, there are many other important verbs, such as consigliare, proporre, suggerire, rispondere, esclamare, soggiungere; but that is the end of our explanation for today, otherwise your head will spin!

How to conjugate the verb DIRE

What conjugation does the verb *dire* belong to?

As in the case of the verb *fare*, this is a much debated issue. What we need to know is that it is an irregular verb and that it comes from the Latin *dicere*; this will help you remember the various forms, just like *fare*.

There are some clear similarities between the conjugations of the verbs *dire* and *fare*; *fare* comes from the latin *facĕre* and *dire* from the latin *dicĕre*. You can use this similarity to your advantage: in the description below you will find the link to the video on *fare*.

Many English-speaking students find remembering conjugations a real nightmare. You don't have to study all night to remember them! My advice is *to use* the conjugations, just don't think of them as a huge table of words. To master the patterns, you can write simple sentences for each person, and you need to say them out loud, you need to pronounce the words, this step will make the endings and sounds stick more easily.

If you need to review the concept of verb conjugation, check out our videos on the topic.

We'll conjugate *dire* in the following tenses: **PRESENTE INDICATIVO, FUTURO SEMPLICE, PASSATO PROSSIMO, IMPERFETTO INDICATIVO, CONGIUNTIVO PRESENTE, CONDIZIONALE PRESENTE.**

PRESENTE INDICATIVO

- You will note that all the forms, except, *voi*, maintain the *c* of the original Latin infinitive *dicĕre*, *io dico*, *tu dici*.

Examples:

Dico di sì!

Cosa dici?

Mario dice sempre la verità.

Diciamo che è ora di andare via.

Dite sempre bugie, sono stanca! [—> same in the imperative: *Dite la verità!*]

Alla tv dicono sempre stupidaggini.

IO DICO
TU DICI
LUI / LEI DICE
NOI DICIAMO
VOI DITE
LORO DICONO

DI, DI' O DÌ?

Di is a preposition: *Il libro di Viola*.

Di' with an apostrophe is the 2nd person of the imperative: *Di' la verità!* The apostrophe shows that it's a truncation of *dici*.

Dì with a stressed I is the masculine noun derived from the Latin *diem* 'day', once alive above all in literary language. It survives in the word *buondì*, which stands for *buongiorno*, good morning. It is also the name of a snack!

La sera del dì di festa - The evening of the feast day

Giacomo Leopardi (1798 - 1837)

PASSATO PROSSIMO

The *passato prossimo*, quite similar to the English present perfect, is a compound tense, formed by a helping verb, *essere* or *avere*, and a past participle.

The helping verb used with *fare* is *avere*, to have, and the past participle is *detto*. It's irregular, so you need to memorise it.

The conjugation is very simple, so no headaches here: you just need to conjugate the verb *avere* and add the past participle *detto*. Easy!

Io ho detto a Marco di andare a casa.

Tu hai detto che non è vero.

Lei ha detto di fare silenzio.

Noi abbiamo detto che è presto.

Voi avete detto la verità.

Loro hanno detto tante bugie.

IO HO DETTO

TU HAI DETTO

LUI / LEI HA DETTO

NOI ABBIAMO DETTO

VOI AVETE DETTO

LORO HANNO DETTO

IMPERFETTO

The imperfetto is used mainly to describe recurring actions in the past, and to describe what happened while another action was in progress.

The imperfetto of *dire* is easy to memorise if you remember the original Latin infinitive *dicere*, just like the verb *fare*.

IO DICEVO
TU DICEVI
LUI / LEI DICEVA
NOI DICEVAMO
VOI DICEVATE
LORO DICEVANO

Da piccola dicevo sempre le bugie.

Ti ho sentito mentre dicevi a Paolo di andare via.

Lei diceva sempre sciocchezze.

Noi dicevamo sempre la verità.

Voi dicevate spesso di voler partire.

Fra di loro dicevano solo poche parole.

FUTURO SEMPLICE

The future simple tense is made by changing verb endings. *Leggo*, I read, becomes *leggerò*, I will read.

To make the future of *dire*, just take away the final e and add the following endings:

-ò, -ai, -à, -emo, -ete, -anno.

Let's try to memorise this conjugation by reading simple sentences out loud:

E ora cosa le dirò?

Mi dirai se ti piace.

Gianni dirà che va bene.

Ti diremo noi cosa fare.

Forse direte la verità.

Ce ne diranno di tutti i colori.

IO DIRÒ
TU DIRAI
LUI / LEI DIRÀ
NOI DIREMO
VOI DIRETE
ESSI DIRANNO

CONGIUNTIVO PRESENTE

The subjunctive mood, congiuntivo, is used to convey doubts, opinions, wishes, and hypotheses. Here we'll see the congiuntivo presente.

The original Latin infinitive *dicere*, needless to say, strikes the eye:

Crede che io dica tutto alla polizia, ma non è vero.

Immagino che tu lo dica per scherzare.

Vuoi che diciamo quello che ha scritto qui?

Penso che lo dicano per irritarti.

(CHE) IO DICA
(CHE) TU DICA
(CHE) LUI / LEI DICA
(CHE) NOI DICIAMO
(CHE) VOI DICIASTE
(CHE) LORO DICANO

CONDIZIONALE PRESENTE

The conditional is used to talk about things that would happen or would be true under certain conditions. Example:

Lo direi se potessi - I would say it if I could.

It is also used in requests and offers:

Lo diresti davvero? - Would you really say it?

Here is the condizionale presente of *dire*:

Ti direi di venire qui, ma sono stanca.

Mi diresti mai una bugia?

Lo direbbe subito, se fosse vero.

Ne diremmo quattro a Marco, ma è permaloso.

Direste che è una copia? Sembra vera!

Non direbbero mai una cosa del genere.

IO DIREI
TU DIRESTI
LUI / LEI DIREBBE
NOI DIREMMO
VOI DIRESTE
LORO DIREBBERO

Set Phrases & Idiomatic Expressions

Now, let's see a few handy expressions with *dire*:

A CHI LO DICI!

Literally it means "who are you saying this to?", but it's used to say "you're telling me!"

Sono stanchissima! I am so tired!

A chi lo dici! Non dormo da due giorni! Tell me about it! I haven't slept in two days!

CHE NE DICI DI...?

Che ne dici di andare allo spettacolo? How about going to the show?

I am asking this question to just one person.

Che ne dite di andare al mare? How about going to the sea?

I am asking this question to several people.

DIRE PANE AL PANE E VINO AL VINO

To call a spade a spade, to say the truth about something, even if it's not pleasant.

É ora di dire pane al pane e vino al vino!

DIRNE QUATTRO / DIRNE DI TUTTI I COLORI A QUALCUNO

To communicate harshly your contrary opinion, to give somebody a piece of your mind.

Adesso te ne dico quattro! Me ne ha dette di tutti i colori!

DIRLA GROSSA!

L'hai detta grossa, hai fatto arrabbiare tutti! You said something out of line, you made everyone angry.

Dirla grossa means to say things that are exaggerated or excessive. "La" in *dirla* is a pronoun, that stands for *cosa*: Hai detto una cosa grossa. Remember the similarities between *dire* e *fare*? We also say: *L'hai fatta grossa!*

SI DICE PER DIRE / SI FA PER DIRE

These phrases are equivalent, they mean that what has just been said is not really to be understood literally, but less seriously.

Non ti preoccupare, si fa per dire! Don't worry, just saying!

TANTO HA FATTO E TANTO HA DETTO CHE...

When someone has put a lot of effort into achieving a goal.

Tanto ha fatto e tanto ha detto, che è riuscito a convincerlo. So much he did and so much he said, that he managed to convince him.

VOLEVO BEN DIRE!

To say that we are sure of something, which seems natural to us.

Volevo ben dire che era così! Literally I wanted to say it was so, but it actually it means I was sure that it was so.

VUOL DIRE CHE...

To introduce the consequences of an action:

Se fai così, vuol dire che la prossima volta non vengo. If you do that, then I won't come next time.

The list is potentially endless; there is so much more to say, c'è ancora molto da dire, but this list is enough to give an injection of spontaneity to your Italian!

I hope that you enjoyed this little guide to the verb *dire*; if you did, leave us a comment! E se qualcosa non è chiaro, ditelo!

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