



57 Reasons to Learn Italian

Marina Melchionda (April 15, 2010)



On March 23-25 the Marriott Hotel in Times Square hosted the 57th edition of the North Eastern Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Language. We walked around the Italian Boot and met some of the most eminent institutional and social representatives of the Italian community in New York and the US who told us why, in their opinion, an American should learn Italian...

It might not be by chance that this year's edition of [NECTFL](#) [2] (North Eastern Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) was held at the [Marriott Hotel](#) [3] in Times Square, THE place where every single day you can hear people speaking in dozens of different languages.

On the fourth floor of the elegant and exclusive hotel, between the Spanish and French aisles, the "Viale Italia" occupied the entire Boot 300.



Green, white, and red flags and banners, books, and maps of Italy and its regions, decorated the long corridor, where stands of the main Italian institutions and Italian Language Schools operating in New York and the US were visited by hundreds of visitors and professors.

These three days of workshops, sessions, receptions, exhibit area visits, and collegial networking organized within the 57th edition of NECTFL, interested about 2,100 world language professionals and confirmed Italian as one of the most attractive languages to American potential or actual students and teachers of a second language.

Also, given the recent discontinuing of the Advanced Placement Italian Language and Culture by the [American College Board](#) [4] in the year 2008-2009, the successful outcome of this event highlights the importance of the efforts made by Italian institutions, organizations, and foundations, who keep promoting its studying also as a major working skill for those operating in fields of international vocation such as fashion, cuisine, music, and high-tech.

As we followed the inauguration of Viale Italia, we had a chance to check out the stands and notice how informative and well-arranged they were. The first one we stopped at was the one of the [John D. Calandra Italian American Institute](#) [5], presided by Dean Anthony J. Tamburri. In what was with no doubts the most technological spot we found in the Italian space, he represented one of the flagships of the City University of New York, as Calandra is nowadays considered the most prestigious research institute in the East Coast for the promotion and study of Italian-American culture and history.

Just in front of Calandra's Stand was [ILICA](#) [6]'s (Italian Language Inter-Cultural Alliance), one of the main sponsors of the Italian pavilion: "We are proud of this initiative, as the number of people visiting the Viale shows how well the Italian language is loved both in New York and beyond. Being an Italian, and not an Italian-American as most of my friends here are, I felt it not only an honor, but also a duty to help organizing our presence at NECTFL. After all we are all part of the same community, we share a common culture, and we must always be ready to support each other for the good of our people", said President Vincenzo Marra.

Consul Laura Anghillare, the highest Institutional Office, attending, backed him completely, as she represents a consular administration that has made of the promotion of the Italian language one of its strong points. "Besides the American citizens who wish to enlarge their cultural horizons by learning a new language, or the Italians living here who wish to maintain and hand down their cultural background to their children, there is also a consistent number of Italian-American young adults that are rediscovering their roots starting with the learning of the Italian language. In all three of these cases we can't afford or allow the loss of this cultural patrimony, and are tenaciously fighting to defend it and spread it", she stated, as we were joined by Berardo Paradiso, President of [IACE](#) [7] (Italian-American Committee for Education).

Mr. Paradiso traced back with us the reasons why many of the Italian-Americans here in the United States do not know the language anymore. "About 4.2 million people came to this country in different waves of immigration. Most of those who came between the end of the XIX century and the beginning on the XX did not teach their descendants the Italian language both because the greatest number of them did not speak anything but dialect, and also because it soon became the language of the enemy as the war broke out. After three or more generations we finally find people of Italian heritage who are not ashamed of their origins and want them to become part of their life. We welcome this desire, and try to boost it through a whole range of projects and educational activities that we sponsor both here and in Italy".

One of the main partners of IACE is the "[Scuola d'Italia Guglielmo Marconi](#) [8]", also present at NECTFL 2010 and represented by its Dean.

Dean Anna Fiore runs this unique bilingual and bi-curricular education institution that welcomes students from the Preschool level through Liceo. "We recently started a partnership with the [University for Foreigners of the City of Perugia](#) [9] to enhance Student Exchange Programs and



research projects on bi-lingual teaching. We also wish to involve our teachers and the parents of our students in Specialistic Adult Courses on Bi-Lingual didactics and Italian as a foreign language. It's a 360° goal that we aim to achieve, and we felt there would be no better way to start promoting it than from here".

Alfio Russo, the Director of the Education Office at the [Consulate General of Italy in New York](#) [10], highlighted how important it is to know the Italian language in every field of art and literature: "Italian is an essential tool for Opera lovers, fashion enthusiasts, for gourmets who love our cuisine, and for those who love literature classics such as Dante's Inferno or Pirandello's works. We want to involve both Italian and American students in all of this, we want to take them to the museums to admire our artists' works of art; take them to concerts and theatrical representations, as we believe it is the best contribution we can give to the enrichment of their life and their growth".

As other stands suggested, there is another great way to learn Italian: visit Italy!

[ENIT](#) [11]'s (Italian Government Tourism Board) spot featured brochures and flyer's from every region of the peninsula, the perfect destination for every kind of tourist, from the sea lovers to the mountain lovers; from the gourmet traveler to the adventurer. The message basically was that, in order to learn the language at the highest level, one has to experience a life moment in Italy, pick the place or territory of his dreams, and just let it conquer him. Talking to the local inhabitants, going to the neighborhood grocery shop, or chatting with somebody you don't know in the city park, can make you feel more Italian and learn more of the Italian way of life that any book could ever do... Living a few months in Italy or spending a nice vacation there can also improve your vocabulary and grammar skills much faster. You would mostly speak in Italian to the people surrounding you, and would learn new words everyday.

However, if you still feel you need or want help with your Italian skills, you can contact [Edultalia](#) [12], an organization that helps both foreign professors and students to find a good school or university anywhere in Italy. With their stand they confirmed a constant presence at NECTFL: it's the third year that they participate in the initiative, given their strong interest in Americans as traditional lovers of Italian Culture.

According to all of those we spoke to, this year's edition of the North Eastern Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages was a success, and all of the Italian institutions attending are intentioned to participate to next year's appointment in Baltimore.

They announced it during a fabulous reception sponsored by ILICA and enriched with [Chef Andrea Tiberi](#) [13]'s delicious dishes, held at the Consulate General of Italy in New York.

A piece of lasagna, Italian cheeses, and dozens of baba pastries were the perfect ingredients of an evening in which the only language accepted to laugh and enjoy each other's company was...Italian!

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