

Preserving the Italian Language

Laura Pace (November 01, 2019)



Though it sounds like something out of an ancient tale, the Accademia della Crusca is a real institution in Italy, composed of the leading experts of Italian language and philology. Its contribution to our country is "meraviglioso," as its president Claudio Marazzini explains at the Italian Cultural Institute in New York in occasion of Italian Language Week.

Seven days a year, the stages of all Italian institution's worldwide are devoted to her, the Italian language.

Each October, in fact, we celebrate Italian language Week, an initiative launched in 2001 by the [Accademia della Crusca](#) [2] in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. A unique opportunity to promote and celebrate Italian language and culture in all of its manifestations. Each year, debates, encounters, and events are centered around a different theme. This year it's theatre.

Last Friday, the Italian Cultural Institute in New York hosted an event titled “L’italiano è meraviglioso: what the Accademia della Crusca does for the language.” The guest of honor was the President of the Accademia, Claudio Marazzini, who was introduced by his friend and colleague Hermann Haller, Professor of Italian and French at Queens College.

Marazzini delighted audience and press with a passionate, at times ironic, conversation about the importance of the Accademia, which has since the beginning been dedicated to the safeguard of the Italian language.

He invited people to read his latest book “L’italiano è meraviglioso. Come e perché dobbiamo salvare la nostra lingua” (Italian is wonderful. How and why to save our language) but also to visit Florence and the Villa Medicea, where the Accademia is located. The villa is home to 160.000 thousand books on the Italian language - some of them impossible to find online - which you can consult in person.

Beyond these consultation services, the Accademia also provides clarifications regarding possible grammatical or lexical mistakes as well as to doubts pertaining to new words, for example in the much talked-about case of “petaloso,” a word invented by a primary school child and approved by the Accademia to be included in the dictionary.

The Accademia della Crusca advises but doesn’t impose rules, Marazzini reveals. Contrarily to its French or Spanish “sister” institutions, the Crusca is not state sanctioned and cannot fine those who do not employ the language according to their norms, as is the case in France.

Marrazini states that “Italian is a language without empire or army, since it flourished before the nation was born. We are the ones who have to maintain this language intact and pure.”

This sentence summarizes the core issue of the debate as it is expressed by the Accademia’s own motto, a verse by the poet Petrarca, which reads: “il più bel fior ne coglie” (she gathers the fairest flower)

A metaphor that recalls white flour, onced used to bake the bread for the rich, while the poor used “crusca” (bran.) The Accademia’s very mission is built around this symbolism and its main goal remains that of distinguishing the purest aspects of the language, the white flour, from the bran, selecting from both, sifting, and then preserving what comes out in the dictionary.

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Links

[1] <http://iitaly.org/files/un-pomeriggio-accademia-della-crusca-visita-guidata-di-una-delle-piu-importanti-istituzioni-0>

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accademia_della_Crusca