

USE OF ITALIAN FROM PAST TO PRESENT

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the use of Italian in the world and in the European Union from past to present and to make determinations about its place among the widely used languages. Italy was established in the very center of the empire as one of the three kingdoms of the Roman Empire. Italian, which is among the Romance languages, is a language developed from folk Latin. It is considered to be the closest language to Latin, which was once the most powerful language in the whole world. In addition to Italy, it is the native language at regional level in countries such as Switzerland, San Marino, the Vatican, Malta, Monaco, Albania. On the other hand, it is an official language at the national level in Italy, Switzerland, the Vatican, San Marino and Slovenia, and at the regional level in Croatia, Albania, Monaco and Malta. With approximately 68 million speakers, Italian is among the top 20 to 30 most widely used languages in the world. Italian, a language used in the European Continent, is the 4th most spoken language in the European Union after English, French and German.

Keywords: component; Italian, World, European Union, Usage.

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of Italians goes back a long way. The name Italy is said to come from the Italic tribes who settled in the Abruzzo region in the central part of the Italian peninsula, according to paintings carved in rocks dating back to 8000 BC in the Val Camonica valley. These tribes, which date back to the 9th century BC, include the Sabines, Samnites and Umbri. The Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus united all these tribes under the name of Italy during his empire and formed the core of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire, with Italy as its center, became one of the largest empires in the world. With the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476, the independent kingdoms of Italy, Gaul and Hispania were established. For a period, Italian lands were invaded by the Lombards, Franks and Arabs. Italy was ruled by city-states during the Middle Ages and the New Age, but in 1861, these states were united to form a single state, the Kingdom of Italy. In 1948 it became a republic ([https://tr.wikipedia.org > wiki > İtalya_tarihi](https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/İtalya_tarihi)).

Italian belongs to the Romance languages family. Like other Latin-derived languages such as French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian and Catalan, Italian derives from medieval vernacular Latin. Today's Italian is formed from the written language of the Tuscan dialect of the Middle Ages. Compared to other Romance languages, Italian is the closest Romance language to Latin. It can be said that having a culture built on the center of the Roman Empire was effective in this. During the Renaissance, it became a lingua franca that influenced other languages ([https://tr.wikipedia.org > wiki > İtalyanca](https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/İtalyanca)).

It is the native language of approximately 60 million people living in Italy. While Italian is the native language of Italy as a whole, it is the native language of Switzerland, San Marino, Vatican City, Malta, Monaco, Albania and other countries at regional level. The total number of native speakers reaches 65 million. It is an official language at the national level in Italy, Switzerland, the Vatican, San Marino and

Slovenia, and at the regional level in Croatia, Albania, Monaco and Malta. It is also the native language of Italian immigrants in the United States, Argentina, Brazil, Canada and Australia (<https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italyanca>).

Italian is among the top 20 to 30 languages spoken in the world. The number of users, both native and foreign, varies depending on the source, but is estimated to be between 68 and 85 million.

Italian is not ranked high among the widely taught/learned languages in the world. However, it is one of the important languages taught in the United States. In the school programs of the European Union countries, Italian is ranked among the compulsory elective or free elective courses as a foreign language. After English, French, German and Spanish, Italian is ranked the fifth most preferred language.

Turks have been using Italian since the Ottoman Empire period. The main reason for this is based on the trade relations with the Genoese and the Republic of Venice. On the other hand, the fact that the Kingdom of Italy was advanced in culture and art also contributed to the interest in Italian in the Ottoman Empire. Italian was an accepted language not only among the people but also in the palace (Karasubaşı, 2012:78). In order to teach Italian in the Ottoman Empire, Language Boys' School (Dil Oğlanları Okulu) was established by Italians, and Italian was also taught in church schools (Polat, 1989: 563-565). As for the teaching/learning of Italian as a foreign language in Turkey, although it has never been as widespread as English, French and German, its place in the programs of some schools and especially universities has increased recently (Aktaş, 2013:29-33).

Italy has an important place in the world, especially in the field of culture and art, so Italian is a language that is widely used in architecture, fine arts, fashion-design and gastronomy. In education, it can be said that it is ranked in the top 10 among the languages learned as a foreign language in the world.

The aim of this study is to investigate the use of Italian in the world and in the European Union from past to present and to make evaluations about its place among various languages.

II. METHOD

This study was conducted based on descriptive analysis. Qualitative method and document analysis model, one of the scientific research methods, were used in the study. The data obtained from the scanning of digital and printed sources were analyzed and various determinations were made.

III. FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

A. Use of Italian in the World

Define abbreviations and acronyms the first time they are used in the text, even after they have been defined in the abstract. Abbreviations such as IEEE, SI, MKS, CGS, sc, dc, and rms do not have to be defined. Do not use abbreviations in the title or heads unless they are unavoidable. We have found it appropriate to examine the data of Ethnologue and Lingua sites, which are the most research sites on languages, and visual capitalist sites. According to the data of Ethnologue (<https://www.ethnologue.com>), Italian is ranked 29th with 68,000,00 million users in the ranking of the 200 most spoken languages in the world according to 2023 data, In Lingua (<https://lingua.edu>) it is ranked 20th with 85,000,000 million users in the ranking of the most spoken languages in the world according to 2023 data and in Visual Capitalist (<https://www.visualcapitalist.com>) it is ranked 25th

with 67,894,920 users in the ranking of the top 100 most spoken languages in the world according to 2020 data. Although different figures and rankings are given in various sources, many sources place Italian among the top 20 to 30 most spoken languages in the world. Since the data of Ethnologue and Lingua sites are 2023 up-to-date data, it was deemed more appropriate to present them in detail here.

TABLE I. TOP 30 LANGUAGES WITH THE MOST SPEAKERS IN THE WORLD ACCORDING TO THE ETHNOLOGUE WEBSITE
([HTTPS://WWW.ETHNOLOGUE.COM](https://www.ethnologue.com) ›)

Sr no	Language	First Language	Second Language	Total Speakers
1	English (excl creol language)	380 million	1.077 billion	1.456 billion
2	Mandarin Chinese (excl oth vart)	939 million	199 million	1.139 billion
3	Hindi (excl other languages)	345 million	266 million	609 million
4	Spanish (excl creol language)	485 million	74 million	559 million
5	French	81 million	229 million	310 million
6	Standart Arabic (excl dialects)	0	274 million	274 million
7	Bengali	234 million	39 million	273 million
8	Portuguese	236 million	27 million	263 million
9	Russian	147 million	108 million	255 million
10	Urdu (excl Hindi)	71 million	161 million	232 million
11	Indonesian	44 million	155 million	199 million
12	Telugu	75 million	58 million	133 million
13	Japanese	123 million	02 million	123 million
14	Nigerian Pidgin	5 million	116 million	121 million
15	Egyptian Arabic	77 million	25 million	102 million
16	Marhati	83 million	16 million	99 million
17	Standart German	83 million	13 million	96 million
18	Turkish	84 million	6 million	90 million
19	Tamil	79 million	8 million	87 million
20	Yue Chinese	86 million	1 million	87 million
21	Vietnemase	85 million	1 million	86 million
22	Wu Chinese	83 million	01 million	83 million
23	Tagalog	29 million	54 million	83 million
24	Korean	82 million	-	82 million
25	Iranian Persian (excl Dari)	57 million	21 million	79 million
26	Hausa	52 million	27 million	79 million
27	Swahili	16 million	55 million	71 million
28	Javanese			68 million
29	Ítalien	65 million	3 million	68 million
30	WesternPunjabi			67 million

With 65 million native speakers and 3 million second language speakers, Italian is ranked 29th among the most spoken languages in the world. It is ranked 20th in terms of native speakers and 23rd in terms of second language learners.

The Lingua website does not distinguish between native and second language users when sharing the data. According to 2023 data, the languages are ranked in the top 30 are given as the overall number of speakers.

TABLE II. TOP 30 LANGUAGES WITH THE MOST SPEAKERS IN THE WORLD ACCORDING TO LINGUA WEBSITE DATA
([HTTPS://LINGUA.EDU](https://lingua.edu) >)

	Language	Total Speakers
1	English	1.452 billion speakers
2	Mandarin Chinese	1.118 billion speakers
3	Hindi	602 million speakers
4	Spanish	534 million speakers
5	Arabic (total dialect)	372 million speakers
6	French	300 million speakers
7	Bengali	265 million speakers
8	Russian	258 million speakers
9	Portuguese	223 million speakers
10	Swahili	200 million speakers
11	Indonesian	200 million speakers
12	Urdu	170 million speakers
13	Japanese	150 million speakers
14	German	135 million speakers
15	Punjabi	125 million speakers
16	Farsi	110 million speakers
17	Javanese	98 million speakers
18	Wu Chinese	90 million speakers
19	Vietnamese	87 million speakers
20	Italian	85 million speakers
21	Turkish	85 million speakers
22	Marathi	85 million speakers
23	Telugu	82 million speakers
24	Tamil	78 million speakers
25	Korean	77 million speakers
26	Jin Chinese	70 million speakers
27	Hausa	70 million speakers
28	Thai	69 million speakers
29	Yue Chinese	68 million speakers
30	Gujarati	61 million speakers

According to the data provided by the Lingua website, Italian is ranked 20th with 85 million speakers. The Lingua website's data includes the total population of the countries and regions where Italian is spoken as an official language, and is therefore thought to contain higher figures.

Although these data show that Italian is in the top 30 of the most widely spoken languages in the world, when evaluated in historical perspective, it is seen that Italian has not been able to increase its number of users in history. When Italy, Spain and France, the three kingdoms that are the heirs of the Roman Empire, are compared, Spanish, the language of the Kingdom of Spain, it is ranked 4th in the world in terms of the number of Spanish speakers, while French, the language of the Kingdom of France, ranks 5th.

According to data from the Ethnologue website in 2023, a total of 559 million people speak Spanish, of which 485 million are native speakers and 74 million are second language speakers. French is spoken by 310 million people, of whom 81 million are native speakers and 229 million are second language speakers. Italian has only 65 million native and 3 million second language speakers. There are more than 8.2 times (820%) as many Spanish speakers as Italian speakers and more than 4.5 times (450%) as many French speakers. When the figures are compared in terms of native speakers, there are about 7.5 (750%) times more native speakers of Spanish than native speakers of Italian, and about 0.25 (25%) times more native speakers of French. When the status of these three languages is evaluated in terms of their use as second languages, the proportion of those who speak Spanish as a second language is 24.6 (2460%) times higher than those who speak Italian as a second language and 76.3 (7630%) times higher than those who speak French as a second language.

Although Italy is a state established at the center of the Roman Empire and Italian is the closest Romance language to Latin, the reason why Italian is not at the top of the ranking of the most widely used languages in the world compared to the other two Romance languages can be thought to be related to the politics and language policies of the Italian state as well as its past power and colonial activities. Immediately after the discovery of the Americas by the Italian navigator Christopher Columbus in 1492, the Spanish Empire began colonizing the new continent in 1496, establishing colonies almost everywhere in Central America and South America. The reason why Spanish, which is the official language of 20 countries today, is so widespread in the world is based on this historical process. Around this time, the Kingdom of France also acquired small colonies in North America. The Kingdom of France's main colonies were in Africa. In 1524, it started colonial activities and dominated most of the African continent. Thanks to these historical colonial activities, the number of people using French as an official language in Africa today is higher than both France and the European Continent. Add to this the French colonies in other parts of the world and it becomes clear why French, which has the status of an official language in 28 countries, ranks 5th among the most widely used languages in the world today. Although Eritrea, then Libya and Somalia, and finally Ethiopia were invaded by the Kingdom of Italy at the end of the 19th century in 1890 and turned into Italian colonies, this process did not last for centuries and Italian did not take root there. Italian has official language status in only 5 countries. These are European countries with small populations. Like other languages, the teaching/learning of Italian as a second or foreign language is related to Italy's cultural, historical, social and economic power (Diadori, Palermo and Troncarelli, 2009: 25).

When it is investigated at the current language policies of these three countries, it can be seen that France, especially the European Union, on the one hand, opposes the spread of English, and on the

other hand, strives for the further strengthening of French, especially through the Community of French Speaking Countries (Francophonie), which is organized worldwide. Along with English, French is one of the two languages of many organizations, institutions and organizations in the world and in the European Union. Latin American countries of Spanish origin are struggling for Spanish, which is the second most spoken language in the United States after English, to be recognized as an official language in the country. Spain, too, wants to make Spanish more visible within the European Union. Although Italy and Italian have a deep-rooted culture, it cannot be said that Italy has an effective language policy to promote Italian in the world. However, Italy, which is the third most populous country in the current European Union after Germany and France, demands that Italian be more prominent in the Union.

B. Italian in the European Union

According to 2012 data, the top 5 languages used as mother tongue and foreign language in the European Union are listed as follows. Since the UK will leave the Union in 2020, the data on English includes the current data.

TABLE III. TOP 5 LANGUAGES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION BY NUMBER OF USERS (COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE, EUROBAROMETER, 2012)

Language	Language Native speakers in the EU	Foreign speakers in the EU	Total percentage of speakers
English	%1	%41	%42
German	%16	%11	%27
French	%14	%12	%26
Italian	%13	%3	%16
Spanish	%8	%7	%15

Italian is ranked 4th in the European Union with 16% of users. As a native language, Italian is ranked 3rd with 13% of users, while as a foreign language it is ranked 5th with 3% of users, behind English, French, German and Spanish. While Italian is the mother tongue in Italy at the national level, in Europe it is the mother tongue at the regional level in countries such as Switzerland, San Marino, Vatican, Malta, Monaco, Slovenia, Croatia, Albania. Among Romance languages, French ranks 10% above Italian, especially with 12% of foreign language users and 26% overall. Italian is 5% ahead of Spanish in terms of native speakers and 4% behind Spanish in terms of users as a foreign language. In total, it has 1% more users than Spanish in the EU.

According to a 2015 Eurostat (Develey, 2017) survey of 17 million students between the ages of 11 and 15 in the first cycle of secondary education, 97.3% of students learned English, 33.8% French, 23.1% German, 13.6% Spanish, while Italian learners remained at a lower rate, not reaching the top 10%.

Many European Union member countries include Italian as a foreign language in their school programs at primary or secondary education level. Especially European countries with dense populations and Italy's neighboring countries have included Italian in the list of foreign languages taught in schools. On the one hand, England, France and Germany are the countries where foreign languages are most widely taught, while on the other hand, one of English, French and German is

usually a compulsory subject for all students. In addition to these three languages, Italian, Russian and Spanish are other languages offered as compulsory or optional foreign languages (British Council, 2013:9).

TABLE IV. ITALIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN PRIMARY/SECONDARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES (BRITISH COUNCIL, 2013):

Country	Compulsory Languages	Elective	Free Languages	Elective
Germany			X	
Australia	X			
Belgium			X	
Bulgaria	X			
France	X			
Croatia			X	
England	X			
Hungary	X			
Spain			X	
Malta	X			
Polond			X	
Romania	X			
Slovenia	X			
Greece			X	

Italian is among the compulsory or optional foreign languages taught in primary or secondary education institutions in most European Union countries. In 8 countries it is among the compulsory elective languages in school programs, while in 6 countries it is among the free elective languages in school programs.

C. Italian in International and European Union Organizations, Institutions and Institutions

Italian is not among the languages widely used in international organizations, institutions and agencies around the world. Although Italy is the fifth largest financial supporter of the United Nations, Italian is not among the working languages of the organization. The Organization accepts English, French, Chinese and Russian as working languages, which are the official languages of its permanent members, as well as Spanish and Arabic, which are widely used in the world and are official languages of many countries. The number of international and regional organizations in which Italian is an official language is quite limited.

TABLE V. INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS WHERE ITALIAN IS AN OFFICIAL LANGUAGE
([HTTPS://FR.WIKIPEDIA.ORG > WIKI > LIST_D'ORGANISATIONS_INT](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_d'organisations_internationales))

Organizations	Status	Official languages	City	Country
G7	International	English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese		
Latin Union	Regional	French, Spanish, Italian, Catalan, Catalan, Portuguese, Romanian	Paris	France
OSCE	Regional	English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Russian	Warsaw	Polond

In the G7 grouping, Italian is used alongside English, French, Spanish, German and Japanese. Italian is one of the 6 official languages of the Latin Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The official languages of the member states of the European Union are also official languages of the Union. In the European Parliament, each deputy has the right to speak in the official language of his/her country. However, translations in various committees of the parliament are usually done in English, French and German (Yorulmaz, 2013:206). Likewise, press statements are mostly made in these three languages. Through the system established by the European Parliament, texts are first translated into English, French or German, which are the most widely used languages, and then translated into Italian, Spanish and Polish, which are other important community languages (Yazar, 2017:139).

Italian is among the 20 official languages of the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the European Court of Justice, the European Court of Auditors, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Committee of the Regions and the European Central Bank. In the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions, Italian is also used as a working language, albeit limited, along with the other 20 languages (Herbillon, 2003). The official or working languages of many other European Union organizations, institutions and bodies are English, French and German, sometimes English and French, rarely only English or French. Therefore, Italian is hardly used as a working language in the organizations, institutions and bodies of the European Union.

Founded in 1993, Euronews is one of Europe's largest broadcasting organizations and Italian is one of its 9 broadcast languages, along with English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Arabic and Turkish.

A large-scale survey conducted by the European Commission in 2012 among citizens of European Union member states provides information on the extent to which Europeans use languages in everyday life. 54% of Europeans reported being able to speak at least one foreign language, 25% at least 2 foreign languages and 10% at least 3 foreign languages. The 5 most spoken languages are English 38%, French 12%, German 11%, Spanish 7% and Russian 5%. On the other hand, 25% of the citizens of the member states of the European Union stated that they could understand television and radio broadcasts in English, 7% in French, 7% in German, 5% in Spanish and 2% in Italian. The proportion of those who read and understand newspapers and magazines is similar: 25% can understand what they read in English, 7% in French, 6% in German, 4% in Spanish and 2% in Italian (Commission européenne, Eurobarometer, 2012).

When the use of Italian in social and business life in the EU is analyzed, it can be said that it is one of the most widely used languages.

TABLE VI. THE 5 MOST USED LANGUAGES IN NEWSPAPERS AND BUSINESS (BRITISH COUNCIL, 2013:40)

Newspaper Languages	Frequency	Non-English Frequency in Companies	Frequency
English	408	German	430
German	270	Russian	333
French	181	French	322
Russian	162	Spanish	155
Italian	127	Italian	134

According to the data in the table, the 5th most common language of printed newspapers is Italian with 127 newspapers. In a survey conducted to determine the use of languages other than English in 484 companies in the European Union, it was found that Italian was again used in 134 companies and was the 5th most common language. These data reveal that Italian ranks 5th among the most widely used languages in social and business life, although not in the official institutions, organizations and organizations of the European Union.

IV. CONCLUSION

Italian, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Catalan and Romanian are among the six Romance languages. However, while Spanish and French, the languages of the Spanish Kingdom and the French Kingdom, are widely used all over the world, the use of Italian, the language of the Italian Kingdom, is limited to the European Continent. Apart from Portugal, Portuguese, the mother tongue of a large country such as Brazil, is well ahead of Italian in terms of geography and number of speakers. Apart from Italy, Italian is the mother tongue at regional level in Switzerland, San Marino, Vatican City, Malta, Monaco, Albania. It is also an official language at the national level in Italy, Switzerland, the Vatican, San Marino and Slovenia, and at the regional level in Croatia, Albania, Monaco and Malta. It is ranked among the top 20 to 30 widely used languages in the world by different sources. It is ranked 4th among the languages used in the European Union in terms of the number of speakers and 5th among the most taught/learned languages. Although it is not among the most widely used languages in the world, Italian, which has an important place in the fields of culture, architecture and fine arts, is thought to be among the languages that will continue to exist for a long time in the future.

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