
Fratter, Ivana and Claudia Troncarelli. ***Piazza Navona. Corso di italiano per stranieri.*** ***Livello A1-A2.***

Genova: Cideb Editrice, 2006. Includes audio CD. ISBN: 978-88-530-0300-3.

Piazza Navona is an Italian course written and published in Italy for beginning to intermediate students. It includes a textbook and one audio CD. The levels A1-A2 indicated in the subtitles may need some clarification for an American audience, as they refer to the Common European Framework of Reference established by the European Union Council Resolution in 2001. On a comparative basis, the A1-A2 levels should correspond, with some approximation due to the difference in the articulation of these standards, to the ACTFL/ETS Scale Novice to Intermediate High or 0+ to 1+ ILR or Government (FSI) scale.

The course is presented and organized in units and thematic subunits within four main linguistic contexts: personal, public, professional, and educational. As the authors point out, this course was conceived for independent study, and in this sense it appears to be a very manageable introduction to Italian. The layout, images, and photos are very crisp and pleasing to the eye. Another positive aspect is the use of many authentic pictures and notes depicting and explaining the most recent public documents and cards used in Italy to carry out basic public transactions, from the health card (*carta sanitaria*) to the European electronic driving license (*patente informatica*).

One of the drawbacks of the program is the limited practice available in the text and in the audio CD, since there is no accompanying laboratory manual or supplemental workbook. In this sense, *Piazza Navona* would require a lot of extra work on the part of a class instructor to supplement and create dynamic class interaction. This is also true for the audio CD, which is too short to provide much real practice for listening, pronunciation, or comprehension practice. One suggestion to the author would be to insert a list of Web links to help the self-learner or the instructor draw from other sources as a way to promote independent learning.

Although it is true that basic grammar structures are summarized at the end of each unit to allow focus on the communicative aspects of the language, it should also be pointed out that they sometimes appear too sketchy. For example, occasionally some graphics (designed, I assume, to downplay the boredom of a grammar rule) are unclear in their purpose or slightly imprecise, such as the list of possessive adjectives and the presentation chart for the imperfect tense. The activities presented for each unit, so few and far between, can only give a very poor taste of the language and do not allow enough time and opportunity to master any structure or vocabulary to prepare for tests. Specifically, I am thinking of a college curriculum where usually students' progress is assessed with some regularity, perhaps even on a biweekly basis.

All in all, *Piazza Navona* is a fun and refreshing basic Italian course, and it could also be used in a class for foreign learners in Italy; such courses are organized by local Italian authorities to serve the growing foreign population and are becoming ever more numerous. However, it would probably be of marginal use in American colleges or even Board of Education approved courses where the curricula are designed with very specific benchmarks.

Brunella Bigi, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Italian
Defense Language Institute
Monterey, CA