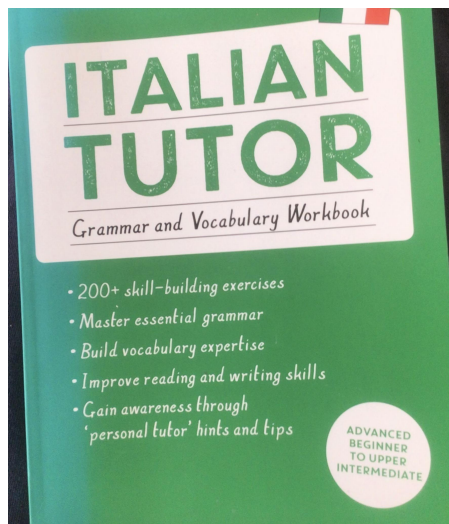


# What is the relationship between knowledge and culture?

Figure 1: Intermediate Italian Workbook



I used this intermediate Italian language book to learn Italian for the first time. The reason why this book is important to me is that it proved to me that knowledge of a language is the key to immersing oneself in a different culture. The reason why my object is relevant to culture has to do with my Italian background. I didn't know any Italian before using this book. In the past when I talked to my cousins in English we were not able to communicate very clearly. When I talked to my aunts and my grandmother in English, we were able to communicate effectively but I realised that I was missing something intangible. Soon I began to learn some basic Italian with my workbook along with some assistance from my parents. This was also enriched by my French and Spanish studies at school which helped me to recognise some of the Italian vocabulary. Although for practical purposes I could more easily express myself in English, by knowing some Italian I could enter into the culture. When I was invited to join my relatives on an evening 'passeggiata', a dictionary informed me that this meant going for a walk. However, this translation did not convey the full meaning of a 'passeggiata', which combines an evening stroll around the piazza, a social occasion, a fashion parade and a matchmaking session, all rolled into one. A precise English translation does not exist because the concept does not exist. Therefore, people do not just "know another language", they live another culture and by endeavouring to speak Italian, I was able to enter into that culture. Most of us will only ever learn one or two foreign languages in our lifetimes, if any, but one is enough to open the mind to the fact that our own culture is not the only way of living.

Figure 2: The Rosetta Stone



The Rosetta Stone was created in the time of King Ptolemy V in 196 B.C. It is a document which records that in return for granting tax reductions and the restoration of peace after a recent rebellion, the priests of Memphis pledge their loyalty and support for King Ptolemy. The decree was copied on to large stone slabs called stelae, which were placed in every temple in Egypt. Most importantly, the stone contained a translation from Ancient Greek to Egyptian which allowed scholars to decode Egyptian hieroglyphics and better

understand a culture that was previously inaccessible. The reason for having the decree in both these languages was because the ruling Egyptian class tended to use Greek but ordinary citizens used Egyptian. The reason why this is linked to the content of the decree itself is that the King clearly wanted to disseminate the knowledge of his victory throughout the empire so that everyone would be aware of his authority. This demonstrates how culture affects why figures of authority within a society wanted to disseminate certain kinds of knowledge. The ancient Egyptian Empire lasted for thirty centuries in an era when borders between communities and countries were not rigidly defined. In order to manage this vast empire with many different ethnicities and communities, the rulers had to ensure that the population was compliant. The fact that the priests of Memphis, the leaders of the Egyptian religion, supported the King gave the impression that Ptolemy V had divine backing. This proves that culture affects the way in which leaders or rulers invoke religion to their advantage in order to spread knowledge of their legitimacy and popularity. The text of the Rosetta Stone communicated to the King's subjects that he desired a secure and stable reign. Language was an integral part of achieving this and so the reasons for disseminating knowledge within a culture depends on the principles which are valued most highly within that culture.

Figure 3: A Piece of Aboriginal Art by Michelle Possum Nungurrayi 'Womens' ceremony'



Aboriginal art is beautiful and detailed. One way of gaining knowledge about a culture is by studying its art. The Aborigines, unlike more modern cultures, used art to express practical ideas and depict resources which were essential for survival. Efficient communication was vital. This piece was made by the aboriginal artist Michelle Possum Nungurrayi, who was born in 1970 and is one of the founding artists of the contemporary indigenous art movement. The piece contains groups of similar symbols clustered together. The symbols are not abstract, they represent very specific things. The horseshoe ring represents a person, the two large circles represent campsites or watering holes, the white streaks represent human footprints and the red rectangles represent hunting sticks. By studying art, we can gain knowledge of different cultures and understand what knowledge is considered vital within that society. The title of this piece - 'A Women's Ceremony' - indicates that shared activities were considered important for building a sense of solidarity within the community. The symbols also stress the importance of hunting and awareness of the natural world. This makes sense because the Aborigines were a nomadic people who did not settle down to form permanent settlements. In the modern world, this type of knowledge has been neglected since modern activities such as banking, law or computing require different types of knowledge and expertise. This proves that certain types of knowledge are valued in different cultures, depending on the needs of the community. For any culture to prosper, the knowledge that is disseminated and distributed must be tailored to the material and spiritual needs of that society.

**Word count = 932**

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