

ITALIAN MUSICIANS

Test d'inglese: quanti possono competere con **Elisa** nel panorama musicale italiano? Pochissimi, e noi li abbiamo messi alla prova.

by Fergal Kavanagh

How Good Is Their English?

LANGUAGE LEVEL
INTERMEDIATE

Track **6**

Speaker:
Chuck Rolando
(Standard American
accent)

Pop music, rock music, it's everywhere! But many of our favourite artists sing in English, often creating difficulties for non-native English speakers. Some students use this to their advantage, analysing the lyrics¹ to improve² their language level. We at Speak Up decided to find out³ how well home-grown Italian stars⁴ speak and understand the international language used in music.

First up, we asked Edoardo Bennato when he had started listening to international music:

Edoardo Bennato

(Italian accent):

When I was a kid, I used to listen to American music: Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, the first era of rock'n'roll, Paul Anka, I remember the first song was "Diana": "I'm so young

and you're so old, that's my darling, I have been told." It's... I think that this is the best way for young people to learn English because the sound of the

language is very important.

Sounds good! Bennato chooses his words carefully⁵, and although there is a slight

Edoardo Bennato
FLUENCY: *Very good.*
ACCENT: *Good.*
ADVICE: *Try and be a little less hesitant!*



Meg (seated in the middle) with other members of 99 Posse. She speaks good English, as do Saturnino (pictured below right, with Jovanotti) and (opposite page) Edoardo Bennato.



Glossary

- 1 lyrics - testi.
- 2 to improve - per migliorare.
- 3 to find out - scoprire.
- 4 home-grown Italian stars - star di casa nostra.
- 5 carefully - attentamente.
- 6 a slight trace - un leggera traccia.
- 7 we look forward to that - non vediamo l'ora di sentirlo.
- 8 seeing as - poichè.
- 9 former - ex.
- 10 this makes sense - questo è giustificato.
- 11 huge - enormi.

trace⁶ of an accent, every word is clear. He does, however, pronounce language as "language," which is an obvious reference to Italian. Bennato is currently working on an English version of his very successful musical *Peter Pan*, so we look forward to that⁷.

Meg

Another singer who has found that music can be a great help in learning English is Meg, once of 99 Posse, but now recording her second solo album. She told us: "I remember I was a little child and my parents used to listen to the Beatles and I remember myself imitating those sounds. I couldn't understand a word, obviously!" She understands now and you can hear their influence on Meg, who speaks very naturally, no doubt helped by the time spent on an exchange program in San Francisco and her year at Reading University in England.

Saturnino

Lyrics are not the only medium for improving your language skills through music. Reading about music was what helped Saturnino with the language. Seeing as⁸ he is the former⁹ bassist for Jovanotti, this makes sense¹⁰:

Saturnino

(Italian accent):

I was very curious about the... not a lot about the lyrics of the songs, but... about the interview... the musicians' interview... there was all magazines about electric bass, music, and all (that) stuff. And there was a good distribution of the magazines in Italy, but it was in English... and the only way to know is to... to... to start to learn English.

No huge¹¹ problems, apart from a few plurals, but what a terrible accent! There is, however, something very musical about it.

Saturnino

FLUENCY: *Very good.*
ACCENT: *Poor.*
ADVICE: *Listen more closely to lyrics, rather than just reading about music!*

Granata





Carmen Consoli (above) is fluent in both English and French. Tiziano Ferro (below right) speaks good English, while that of Zucchero (below) is said to be so-so.

Carmen Consoli

Like Meg, Saturnino went to England to study the language. Another singer who studied abroad is Carmen Consoli, who spent time in London. She speaks English and French fluently, with no accent. However, while she is having more and more international success, she will never abandon her native language, telling the *The Italians in London* magazine that "It is important for me to perform in Italian. I want to bring my language and culture as a gift¹², hoping that I am, in return, influenced by another culture."

Tiziano Ferro

Tiziano Ferro is another fan of England's capital. In 2005 he relocated to London, and so it is no surprise that he speaks English almost perfectly. Here he is being interviewed by Finnish television:

Tiziano Ferro
(Italian accent):
I love languages, I think that languages can break the barrier of the communication, so you can meet people, you can, you know, you can be... can get

involved in, you know, in the world. I like travelling, I like, you know, discovering new cultures and definitely the language is one of the thing(s) I really... I am really attracted from.

Laura Pausini

No real problems there, although we say *attracted by*, rather than *attracted from*. Ferro co-wrote the English language hit "Universal Prayer" for the Athens Olympics in 2004, but Laura Pausini has gone one better. She recorded her first full-length album in English in 2002. It wasn't as successful as she had hoped, so since then she has stuck¹³ with Italian and Spanish. She is planning an album in French though, telling America's *Teen FX* magazine: "I love linguistics and I hope to be able to reach a good pronunciation, since it is one of the most interesting languages."

This may not be the most natural, or even correct, way to express this, but we know what you mean, Laura.

Tiziano Ferro

FLUENCY: *Excellent.*
ACCENT: *Very Good.*
ADVICE: *Slow Down*



Marka



unlikely to repeat¹⁷ this elementary error though, as he recently signed up for an English course in one of Milan's language schools. We look forward to hearing the results.

Emo

But is English the best language for music? We asked Emo, singer with Turin-based rock band Linea 77:

Emo

(Italian accent):

Yeah, I think that English is a good language for music, surely one of the best, but, personally, I'm also interested in listening (to) different languages and different sounds, for instance, now I'm listening (to) a lot of African music and Arab hip-hop. I don't

understand a word, but I like the sound. The good thing for English is that it's simple to learn and to get, it's really popular and sounds really, really good.

Zucchero

International collaborator extraordinaire¹⁴ Zucchero is also aware¹⁵ of how singing in English can help his career. In an internet interview he admitted: "I personally prefer to sing in my own language, but the radio in England and America won't play the music, if it's not in English." It would be safer for Zucchero to stick to Italian for conversation, however, to avoid repeating the embarrassing incident at a BBC concert in Belfast in 2004 – the presenter asked who was "that sexy mama" on backing vocals, and was horrified to hear the reply: "My wife."

Eros Ramazzotti

Another whose English could be described as "shaky¹⁶" is Eros Ramazzotti. Interviewed with Anastacia for German television, he referred to his co-guest "she's a women!" He is



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Glossary

- 12 gift - dono.
- 13 she has stuck - ha continuato.
- 14 collaborator extraordinaire - grande collaboratore di artisti.
- 15 aware - consapevole.
- 16 shaky - incerto.
- 17 he's unlikely to repeat - è improbabile che ripeta...

G. Neri



Emo (Linea 77)

FLUENCY: *Excellent.*
ACCENT: *Very Good.*
ADVICE: *Don't forget your prepositions*

Above: Linea 77's Emo is proficient in English, as is Laura Pausini (top left), while Eros Ramazzotti (left) is still learning the language.



Granata

Paolo Conte (above) uses an interpreter for his English-language interviews, while Pavarotti (below) doesn't, although perhaps he should. Marco Mazzoli (below right), Jovanotti (opposite page, above) and Elisa (opposite page, below), don't need one.



Corbis



Marco Mazzoli

FLUENCY: *Excellent.*
ACCENT: *Excellent.*
ADVICE: *Don't bite the hand that feeds you!*²⁰

Excellent English! Although you should remember that we *listen to* music and that we say *the good thing about English*, not *the good thing for English*.

Paolo Conte

Paolo Conte also likes to experiment with different languages. In an American radio interview he said: "For a musician, the Italian language can be very uncomfortable because it's not rhythmic, so sometimes you need to work with a foreign language, with English in particular to give a song a little bit more swing." He chose to speak through an interpreter, which implies he is perfectly comfortable with the rhythm of spoken Italian.

Luciano Pavarotti

It may be safer this way, and Luciano Pavarotti would have been well-advised to use an interpreter in his 2003 interview with CNN's Larry King. Asked if his then current album was crossover¹⁸ because these were songs he didn't normally sing, he replied: "No, I don't - nobody sing these songs because they are written just for me. I think choose very good songs." Lost in translation perhaps, with two huge language errors - *nobody sings these songs*, and *I think I choose very good songs*. Larry King then went on to ask him about his weight problem¹⁹, to which Pavarotti replied: "You are really to talk about this?"

Zoo di 105!

What about the people who bring you the music, those radio DJs? We met Marco Mazzoli of Zoo di 105, the anarchic afternoon show:

Marco Mazzoli:

(American accent):

Italian music? I mean, I don't like Italian music, I'm not supposed to say this, but

I prefer American music or English music because English is much more melodial.

Don't worry Marco, we won't tell anyone you don't like Italian music! Mazzoli has perfect English, with a strong American accent, but he lived in Los Angeles until he was 13.

Jovanotti

While we're on the subject of DJs, did you know that MTV's first ever Italian VJ was Lorenzo Cherubini, better known as Jovanotti? Here he is on German Radio Eins explaining the title of his album "Buon Sangue":

Jovanotti

(Italian accent):

Good blood to everybody! Buon

sangue

has got several meanings in Italy. You know, you say... I make you an example, when your... your parent gives you a good glass of red wine, he tells you, "Drink it, he gonna



Marka



Granata

Jovanotti

FLUENCY: *Excellent.*

ACCENT: *So-so.*

ADVICE: *Work on your accent*

makes you good blood." Or... or we can say also when there is good feeling between two person, we say that good blood is flowing. Now, you can come in Toscana, and you can try what buon sangue means.

Very clear, but so obviously Italian! Also, I wonder if he really meant "your parent" offering you wine, or was it the classic Italian mistranslation of "parente" for relative? Anyway, I look forward to

my next visit to Tuscany!

Jovanotti sang at the San Remo Festival in 1989, but today's participants are less willing to practice their English. We asked Simone Cristicchi if he spoke English, and were told "poco," while Daniele Silvestri's management told us they would not be comfortable with Speak Up using Silvestri's voice on our CD.

Elisa

We've almost managed to complete our article without mentioning the most obvious name, an Italian singer who started out singing in English. Becoming a household name²¹ in 2001, when she won San Remo with her first ever song in Italian, written by Zucchero, Elisa chose the English language as her medium because of her love for Rudyard Kipling and Jim Morrison's poetry, in their original versions. And isn't music a form of poetry? So listen more closely to English lyrics, and soon you too will be able to speak like your favourite stars!



Glossary

- 18 **crossover** - miscuglio di generi.
- 19 **weight problem** - problema di peso.
- 20 **don't bite the hand that feeds you** - non sputare nel piatto in cui mangi.
- 21 **a household name** - conosciuta da tutti.

Raiz the Rastaman...

Raiz (*below*) even sings in English and listeners in the UK actually thought that he was Jamaican, while we don't really know about the English of Daniele Silvestri (*bottom*). Listening to music can be a great way to develop your English. Indeed the author of this article, Fergal Kavanagh, runs a special website that is dedicated to precisely this method. To find out more, visit: www.tuneintoenglish.com.



Masi



Marka