

“Pygmalion” with twisters and anagrams

Professor Mollica at The Emilio Goggio Chair states the importance of teaching a language while making it fun

Acronyms, acrostics, anagrams, and tongue twisters. And using a game of consonants and vowels- that's the trick to teaching a language while making it fun. Professor Anthony Mollica went straight to the point in a lecture organized by the The Emilio Goggio Chair in Italian Studies (chair prof. Salvatore Bancheri, UofT) while also throwing in anecdotes and jokes that didn't spare even the Pope.

“I could speak to you in a serious, austere and even pedantic manner. I hasten to say that what I am about to do is a transgression to Italian and European culture and today I'd like to display the dual personality of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” Mollica said after the introduction by Anne Urbancic, Senior Lecturer at University of Toronto. “A sense of humour is important for communicating,” said Mollica, who then went into detail on the importance of teaching new words through the reading of literary texts “that certainly increase the lexical heritage. Texts utilized for the teaching of languages are for the most part focused on grammar and utilize a lexicon that marries with elements of morphology and syntax necessary for facilitating learning. Even though, one can discover little-used Italian words in some text books utilized in North America, such as for example, *cenotafio* (cenotaph) but do not include *forchetta* (fork) or *cucchiaio* (spoon),” the professor emeritus said in a controversial tone.

“Textbooks used to teach languages appear to focus mainly on the teaching/learning of grammar, using only those lexical items which are suitable to drill the morphology and syntax taught in that lesson. Textbooks written for the learning of Italian should base their introduction of vocabulary on a high-frequency word list,” Mollica said citing books like *Vocabolario fondamentale della lingua italiana* (Italian-language vocabulary) by Sciarone, and *Lessico di frequenza dell'italiano parlato* (frequency lexicon of spoken Italian), by De Mauro, Mancini, Vedovelli, Voghera, and other books that



Professor Anthony Mollica with students from the course “Iudolin-guistica” at the Università per Stranieri di Siena. Above: Mollica in Chicago during a conference organized by the University of Illinois and the Italian Culture Institute in October 2011

“unfortunately are rarely cited or virtually ignored.”

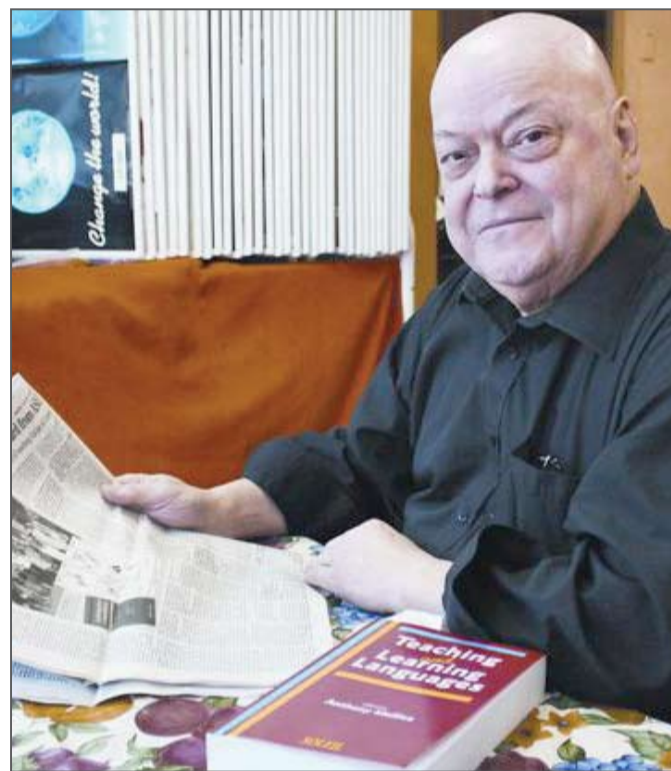
Language and translation don't often move in unison. The goal of a meaningful language course should be “conceptual fluency”: a student must be able to understand the meaning from literal translation in the construction of phrases that in various contexts assume different meanings and concepts.

“*To fall in love* in Italian is *innamorarsi* and cannot be translated literally *sono caduto in amore*. So what can we teachers do to develop semantic-lexical skill? My answer is simple: utilizing recreational linguistics.”

It is a subject that professor Mollica understands well and teaches at University of Toronto Mississauga, and that is the sub-

ject of a summer course at Università per Stranieri in Siena. And bringing to mind George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* in the musical version of *My Fair Lady*- when prof. Higgins corrects the pronunciation of florist Eliza Doolittle, Mollica involved students and public in a series of entertaining tongue twisters, demonstrating how a particular sequence of letters and syllables can make proper pronunciation difficult, or how an alternative pronunciation can change a word's meaning totally. He shared examples in Italian, English, French, German, and Spanish.

From tongue twisters to acronyms “with abbreviations like FBI, used so extensively that one often forgets what they stand for,” to acrostics- “poetic components where letters or



the first words of each verse form a name or phrase,” and finally anagrams “that, as Stefano Bartezzaghi says, are words placed in a blender.”

In summary, professor Mollica has once again demonstrated that recreational linguistics- the applied teaching discipline- is synonymous with success. And as H. H. Stern and Pierre Calvé say, student “involvement” is the key for “a successful class atmosphere: ‘tell me and I'll forget, show me and I'll remember, involve

me and I'll learn’.”

Recreational linguistics in second-language teaching is extremely useful to strengthen grammar, lexicon, and communicative skill. And so the use of puzzle-solving and games in foreign language lessons is becoming an asset selected by many instructors that improves teaching but most of all motivates the student. Because, as Mollica often repeats:

“We don't stop playing because we're old, we become old because we stop playing.” ♦



Show Listings

Toronto Souvenir

This photography exhibition by Garrett Walker goes beyond place and perspective and will explore the living memories of Toronto residents. The exhibit is free with entrance to the Fleck Dance Theatre. March 23 to April 15, 2012, Fleck Dance Theatre, Toronto.

Toronto Art Expo

The popular Toronto art event is back for spring and will feature over 200 Canadian and international artists and galleries, representing over a dozen countries. This year's special featured artists all hail from Asia, with Japan's Midori Toda, China's Zheng Hui Lan and the work of S. Moe Z from the East Gallery, representing Burma, Thailand and Vietnam. There is also a large French representation this year, with over 25 artists from France and 20 from Quebec. Come experience the art event that draws enthusiasts from around the world! April 19-22, 2012 at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre.

Picasso at the AGO

The AGO presents *Picasso: Masterpieces from the Musée National Picasso, Paris*, a collection of more than 150 works from one of the most famous and influential artists, Pablo Picasso.

While The Musée National Picasso, Paris- home to over 5000 items from Picasso's collection undergoes renovation, highlights from it will be touring the world. Toronto is the only Canadian stop on the tour, and the final location before the items are returned to Paris. The exhibit will be displayed chronologically, showcasing key items from almost every phase in Picasso's extensive career. April 28 to August 26, 2012 at the AGO.

Arts and Fashion Week

Held every April, FAT (Fashion Art Toronto) Arts & Fashion Week, formerly Alternative Fashion Week, features more than 200 designers, visual artists and performers, with runway shows, photography exhibits, live music performances and more. The theme for 2012 is fashionSCAPES and will focus on the unique, seasonal and ever-changing landscapes. Artists and designers are encouraged to present creations under one of four sub themes: land, city, body and future. Each night of the festival will focus on one of the sub themes. Join thousands of guests, stylists, members of the fashion industry, and critics for this great event.

April 24-28, 2012. For schedule of events and locations visit: www.fashionarttoronto.ca

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