

Clorinda Donato, Cedric Joseph Oliva, Manuel Romero, and Daniela Zappador Guerra. Juntos: Italian for Speakers of English and Spanish

Kevin B. Reynolds

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Clorinda Donato, Cedric Joseph Oliva, Manuel Romero, and Daniela Zappador Guerra. *Juntos: Italian for Speakers of English and Spanish*. 3rd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2020. Pp. xiii + 303. ISBN 9781585109548.

Juntos: Italian for Speakers of English and Spanish, now in its third edition, challenges the communicative approach that has dominated post-secondary language teaching for the better part of the last four decades. It does not shy away from presenting language “forms,” but does so in a *comparative* rather than *contrastive* way. This of course is where the presence of Spanish, a cognate language to Italian within the Romance family, plays a role. The methodologies employed focus on students’ pan-Romance competencies and are rooted in the theories of (Romance) Intercomprehension and Intercommunication, Transnationalizing, and Translanguaging.

The volume’s *Introduction* makes a compelling argument in favor of the theoretical approaches of Intercomprehension and Intercommunication among the Romance languages, approaches that, since the 1990s, various European projects, such as EuRom4, EuroRomCom, Galatée, Ariadna, and Minerva, *inter alia*, have promoted as guiding principles of language pedagogy and language policy. The authors cite research that confirms that “language acquisition takes place through transfer of knowledge from the languages in one’s linguistic repertoire to the languages being acquired” (viii) and embrace a methodology that seeks to impart a metalinguistic—and therefore a *metacultural*—awareness among language learners. The authors appear to align themselves with a movement that some have termed “post-structuralist” that views contemporary culture as “de-nationalized” and language as “de-territorialized” (“[t]his perspective considers language in contexts of mobility and evolution in which language and culture are no longer seen as nation-specific entities but rather as fluid and evolving modes of communication and expression” [ix]), though they express their approach rather as cutting *across* paradigms: they implore students and instructors “to think about phenomena transnationally, translinguistically, transhistorically, and transculturally” (ix). The project distances itself from the binary notion of two languages/two cultures, in which students’ native cultural and linguistic experiences are marginalized in the L2 learning process. The authors reject the language-pedagogy focus on native competencies or “notions of linguistic and cultural purity,” and turn their attention rather toward “the ongoing creation of new knowledge streams” resulting from transcultural competencies (ix).

The project, operating out of the Clorinda Donato Center for Global Romance Languages and Translation Studies at California State University, Long Beach, is directed towards a primarily American audience, for whom exploiting students' knowledge of Spanish as an L1, L2, or heritage language provides an efficient entry into Italian. This is especially salient in California, where over a quarter of the state's nearly 40 million inhabitants are L1 or heritage speakers of Spanish, and countless others are L2 speakers, but applicable throughout North America, where Spanish has become ubiquitous.

The "lessons" present a fairly conventional sequence of topics, though whereas several topics are usually grouped together into individual chapters in most recent Italian language manuals, each grammar point here is presented in its own. Lessons are divided into sections: 1) Intercomprehension; 2) Intergrammar; 3) In italiano...; 4) Interculture; 5) Languages in transit (translation, translanguaging, transfer); 6) Exploring the Web; and 7) Further focus. Section 1 presents paraphrases in English, Italian, and Spanish, as well as in a few other Romance idioms, with a brief explanation of the grammar point being introduced. The comparison of Romance languages is intended to train students to sharpen their intercomprehension skills through "language noticing." Section 2 presents elements of grammar in a comparative exposition, usually adding French equivalents to paradigms otherwise exhibiting equivalencies across Italian, Spanish, and English. Section 3 allows students to exercise the material acquired in the first two sections in exclusively Italian textual contexts. Section 4 engages students in reading longer passages, which according to research cited, "learners of cognate languages excel at" (xii). Finally, section 5 of each lesson involves translating an Italian passage into English or Spanish or both, the process of which students must then discuss with their classmates. Sharing approaches and problem-solving methods fosters a deepened metalinguistic consciousness in each of the languages involved through a think-aloud protocol. The last sections offer further online supports and resources for expanding practice opportunities and enriching students' knowledge of materials presented in each lesson. There is no explicit delivery of vocabulary, which some students and instructors might find disappointing.

The comparative approach figured prominently in diachronic studies of Indo-European languages in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and would come to inform synchronic linguistic studies as well, but its potential in language acquisition has been surprisingly overlooked since the mid-twentieth century. The present volume seeks to reclaim the utility of comparison and translation in language pedagogy, and to add value to translanguaging and the

knowledge that students possess before embarking on learning Italian. This is the area where this manual makes great strides: it takes a sensibly practical approach to a skill acquisition, but also enhances the experience with a deeper intellectual journey. The volume's weaknesses are largely material in nature, and it is regrettable that the publisher has not addressed these oversights, as it is now in its third iteration. The widespread dependence on color-coding presents unnecessary barriers to readers with sensory impediments. Many passages are set off from other passages by nothing more than a different font color, and some of the colors employed are scarcely distinguishable among themselves. What's more, much of the material is presented in color-coded tables whose backgrounds are simply too dark to have black print superimposed on them. The publisher should be faulted for its indifference to the accessibility needs of its potential clientele. Accessibility laws in certain jurisdictions, such as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), forbid weak color contrast ratios in text such as those frequently employed in the volume under review, or preclude differing font colors from being used as the sole means of communicating information. This is a serious production issue that I would hope a fourth edition might address. If one can separate the intellectual product from the material one, however, the former should be praised for providing a well-structured, theoretically anchored resource to fill a void in the academic marketplace that surprisingly few textbook endeavors have sought to do.

KEVIN B. REYNOLDS
York University