

The many meanings of "*CI*" and how to get it right!

What is this "*CI*" I see everywhere?

One of the most recurring and obscure words in Italian for students of Italian is "*CI*".

"*CI*" is a "**particle**", that is, it's a **little word** that we use to create **specific meaning**, but it does not refer to an object or anything like that. It is **NOT a noun**.

In this lesson we look at the many possible meanings of **CI** and we try to simplify the task of understanding which meaning it's being used each time.

▷ Meaning of "*US*" [Direct Object Pronoun]

The most common meaning of "*CI*" is as a Direct Object Pronoun (the object of a verb). Specifically "*CI*" refers to anything that has to do with "*US*" (as in, "*you and me*").

▷ SOME EXAMPLES:

Loro ci amano

They love us

Tu ci vedi

You see us

Like all Direct Object Pronouns, **CI** goes right **before** the verb (unlike in English).

The Direct Object Pronouns

MI	me
TI	you
LO	him/it
LA	her/it
CI	us
VI	you guys
LI	them (masculine)
LE	them (feminine)

▷ Meaning of "TO US" or "FOR US" [Indirect Object Pronoun]

Another common meaning of "**CI**" is as an Indirect Object Pronoun meaning "*FOR US*" or "*TO US*". It basically **replaces** the recipient of a verb.

▷ SOME EXAMPLES:

Lei ci dà un libro

She gives us a book (she gives a book to us)

Ci hanno portato un tiramisù

They brought us a tiramisù (they brought a tiramisù to us)

Like all **Indirect Object Pronouns**, **CI** goes right **before** the **verb** (unlike in English).

The Indirect Object Pronouns

MI	to me / for me
TI	to you / for you
GLI	to him /for him
LE	to her / for her
CI	to us / for us
VI	to you guys / for you guys
GLI*	to them / for them

There is **another way** of saying "TO THEM" and it's with the pronoun "**LORO**", which must be placed **AFTER THE VERB**.

***Gli** ho dato un regalo*

I gave them a present

or

*Ho dato **loro** un regalo*

I gave them a present

▷ Meaning of "OURSELVES" or "EACH OTHER"[Reflexive Pronoun]

When used **with Reflexive Verbs** or **Reciprocal Verbs**, "**CI**" means "**OURSELVES**" or "**EACH OTHER**", based on the context.

▷ SOME EXAMPLES:

Noi ci laviamo

We wash ourselves

Noi ci amavamo

We used to love each other

Noi ci ricordiamo

We remember

All of the above sentences use "**reflexive verbs**", that is verbs that have an **infinitive** that looks **like this**:

▷ **LAVARSI** (to wash oneself or wash each other)

▷ **AMARSI** (to love oneself, or love each other)

▷ **RICORDARSI** (to remember)

This means that we **MUST add a reflexive pronoun before** the **verb** if we want to maintain their original meaning.

This can be a tricky thing for learners of Italian, as **not all verbs** that are **reflexive in Italian are reflexive in English**. For example, **RICORDARSI** simply means "*to remember*", so you might at

times forget to use the reflexive pronoun... but you have to use it! **RICORDARE**, **without** the **pronoun**, means "*TO REMIND*".

The Reflexive Pronouns

MI	myself
TI	yourself
SI	himself, herself, itself, oneself
CI	ourselves, each other
VI	yourselves, each other
SI	themselves, each other

▷ Meaning of "THERE"

A very frequent and somehow difficult to catch meaning of "**CI**" is "**THERE**", used to **replace** a place that was previously mentioned.

▷ SOME EXAMPLES:

*Quando vai a Roma? - **Ci** vado domani*

When are you going to Rome? - I'm going (there) tomorrow

*Perché hai la borsa? - Per metter**ci** i soldi*

Why do you have a bag? - To put money in it

*Nel frigo **c'**è una birra*

There's a beer in the fridge

*Per cena **c'**è la pizza*

There's pizza for dinner

*Ti **ci** porto*

I'll take you there

"**CI**" with the meaning of "**THERE**" can only be used right **BEFORE the verb**. It cannot be used at the end of a sentence, with the meaning of "**OVER THERE**" (for which we use either "**LÀ**" or "**LÌ**").

*Domani **ci** vado*

Tomorrow I'm going there (the place we are talking about)

Domani vado là

Tomorrow I'm going there (the place I'm pointing at)

▷ **Meaning of "ABOUT IT"**

Now this one is really hard to get used to... Sometimes "**CI**" simply means "**ABOUT IT**" and refers back to whatever was said... and **often** is **not translated** into English.

▷ **SOME EXAMPLES:**

*Chi prepara la cena? - **Ci** penso io*

Who's making dinner? - I'll think about it (as in "I'll take care of it")

Ci pensi che domani saremo in Italia?

Can you believe that tomorrow we'll be in Italy? (can you think about the fact that ...)

Vieni con noi al cinema? - Famm**ici** pensare

Are you coming to the cinema with us? - Let me think about it

"**CI**" with the meaning of "**ABOUT IT**" is often encountered with **verbs of opinion** like PENSARE (to think), CREDERE (to believe) and TROVARE (to find).

▷ "**CI**" with basically **NO MEANING!**

And this one is the one that drives most learners of Italian mad.

Very often you will see/hear a **CI** and **won't be able to make sense** of it. And that's because that particular instance of **CI** has **no meaning/translation in English!!!** Mad, right?

Well, not so much! While it may not have a direct translation into English, that **CI** has all the right to be there, because **it's part of a verb** that you probably don't know. But think you know!

The verbs below ALL exist in their basic form (the one you probably know) AS WELL AS in their form with the **CI** attached.

▷ **CREDERCI**

▷ **METTERCI**

▷ **AVERCELA**

▷ **FARCELA**

▷ VEDERCI

CREDERCI means "*to believe in something*", while **CREDERE** simply means "*to believe*".

METTERCI refers to "*the time that it takes to do something*", while **METTERE** means "*to put*".

AVERCELA means "*to be mad at somebody*", while **AVERE** clearly means "*to have*". Here the **CI** has been changed to **CE** to sound better!

FARCELA means "*to manage, to succeed at something*", while **FARE** means "*to do*" or "*to make*". Here too the **CI** has been changed to **CE** for sound reasons.

VEDERCI refers to "*the ability to see*" (not being blind), while **VEDERE** simply means "*to see*".

▷ SOME EXAMPLES:

*Credi ai fantasmi? - No, non **ci** credo*

Do you believe in ghosts? - No, I don't believe in them

*Quanto **ci** mette il treno per arrivare a Firenze?*

How long does the train take to get to Florence?

***Ce** la fai a venire alla festa?*

Can you make it to the party?

*Voglio aprire la finestra ma non **ce** la faccio*

I want to open the window but I can't (I'm not managing)

*Ma che, non **ci** vedi?*

Man, can't you see? Are you blind?

*Di sera non **ci** vedo molto bene*

At night I can't see too well

▷TURN THE PAGE TO FIND THE SOLUTION TO ALL YOUR PROBLEMS...

Well, just the ones relating to **CI**, to an extent! ;-)

A trick to understand which meaning is being given to "**CI**" when you hear it is to quickly **ask yourself** the following **questions** in this exact order:

1. Does it have to do with "**US**"? [us, to us, for us]
2. Can it be referring to "**OURSELVES**" or "**EACH OTHER**"?
3. Is it perhaps replacing a place that was mentioned earlier?
4. Can it mean "**ABOUT IT**"?

If the **answer** for all the questions is **NO**, then you are most likely dealing with a VERB that you think you know, but you actually don't. That is a verb that uses **CI** to create a **new meaning**.

These are like "*phrasal verbs*" in English ("*go up*", "*go for*", "*go at*" etc): if you don't know the meaning of the verb, you just can't guess it!

Make a mental note of the verb you heard the CI with and then look it up on a dictionary to discover its actual meaning.

For example, if you hear:

Ci provo domani

You'd look up **PROVARCI** to see if it exists with a specific meaning. In this case "*to have a go at something*".

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▷ EXERCISE

Translate the first group of sentences into Italian and the second group into English.

1. You love us!

2. They bought us a present!

3. We wash our hands

4. We are going there for Christmas (there meaning "*Italy*")

5. Would you believe (*pensarci*) that Sam is already 18?

6. Marco e Stefano ci pensano spesso

7. Noi ci prepariamo per la festa

8. Non ci credo che tu non hai la macchina

9. Perché non ci vieni alla festa?

10. Ci metti tantissimo a fare il tiramisù!!!

▷ ANSWERS

Here are some possible translations for the exercises.

1. Tu ci ami
2. Ci hanno comprato un regalo
3. Ci laviamo le mani
4. Ci andiamo per Natale
5. Ci credi che Sam ha già 18 anni?
6. Marco and Stefano think about us often
7. We are getting ready for the party
8. I can't believe you don't have a car!
9. Why aren't you coming to the party?
10. It takes you so long to make tiramisu!

▷ YOUR NOTES