

4 SURPRISING uses of PREGO you NEED to know - Decode REAL Italian Conversations

What you will learn in this class

In this lesson, you will discover four completely different uses of the Italian word "prego" that most learners completely ignore but that Italian native speakers use all the time. This creates a lot of confusion especially when having conversations here in Italy. I will clearly explain all these usages and give you a quick trick to immediately distinguish them so you can understand exactly what "prego" means in any context and sound like a native Italian speaker.

The Most Common Use: "You're Welcome"

Before we dive into the four surprising uses of "prego", let's quickly review the most known usage of "prego" which is **"you're welcome"**. This is definitely the most known meaning of "prego" and that's the standard response to "grazie" (thank you).

What I want you to be aware of though is that we often couple "prego" when used as "you're welcome" with other expressions. Let's suppose you want to tell someone **"thank you for your help" - "grazie per il tuo aiuto"**. If you tell that to someone they will probably reply **"You're welcome"**. But we'll add something else like for example they could say **"Prego, è stato un piacere"** (You're welcome, it was my pleasure).

Notice that we're coupling "prego" with something else to add more emotion. I want you also to notice that in English you say "you're welcome it was my pleasure" but in Italian we say **"è stato un piacere"** - we don't

say "my" for that, that wouldn't sound right, so we say **"è stato un piacere"**.

Use #1: "Please" or "After You"

This is very common and can be used when you are inviting someone to do something like for example entering a room first or start speaking. Let's suppose you are in this very common scenario: you're getting into a shop and while you are passing through the door someone else is actually passing the door too. They will very likely let you in first. How are they going to tell you that? Of course they could just gesture, but probably they're going to tell you the equivalent of "please, after you".

So how do we say "please, after you" in Italian? That is **"prego"**. Here "prego" is not used as "you're welcome", it's used as "please come in, please after you". The complete sentence would be **"Prego, entri Lei"** - that's how we would say that.

Another thing I want you to notice is that we're using the formal "you" - **"Lei"**. You can also say **"entra"** if you're telling that to someone you are familiar with, but if you're in Italy and you are in this situation probably you are crossing someone that's a stranger so they will probably tell you **"Prego, entri Lei"** - they're giving you the formal "you".

Another scenario for "prego" used as "please" or "after you" is if you get into a place, maybe you're invited or you have to wait in a place and someone wants to tell you "please have a seat". That in Italian would be **"Prego, si accomodi"**. That's how we say "please take a seat". Notice again I'm using the formal "Lei" and this is the verb **"accomodarsi"** which is a very common reflexive verb in Italian which means "to take a seat".

So **"Prego, si accomodi"** means "please take a seat". One more thing I want to tell you about this meaning is that often times we don't say the complete sentence, we just say **"prego"** and maybe the hands will help you understand the meaning, or they're probably going to just say **"prego"** while showing you the place where you can sit or pointing at the seats where you can sit.

Use #2: "How Can I Help You?"

This is a situation that's probably going to happen in shops, restaurants or any service situation. In these instances, the staff may use "prego" as a way to ask you "what do you want? how can I help you?"

For example, if you enter a store the employee might say "**prego**". Usually that would be "**Prego, come posso aiutarla?**" This is the full question: "**Please, how can I help you?**" Again I'm using the formal "you" because that's what you are more likely to hear in these situations.

Or if you are at the market, the vendor might just say to you - you're looking at their products and they might just tell you "**Prego, mi dica**". That means "**please tell me**" - implicitly "tell me what you want, tell me what you're looking for".

Even these two sentences are very common in Italian, so this usage of "prego" is very common in Italian that means "please tell me, how can I help you".

Use #3: "Pardon" or "Sorry"

If it happens that you didn't hear or understand what someone said to you, you can use the word "**prego**" to mean that you didn't understand and you want them to repeat. It's a way of asking them to repeat.

Let's suppose you want to say "pardon me, I didn't understand you". How would you say that? "**Prego, non ho capito**". That's a way you can say "**Pardon me, I didn't understand you**".

So "prego" can also be used to make the other person understand that something escaped you. We do have other ways of saying "pardon me, I'm sorry I didn't understand you". As long as you don't say "**cosa**" because it would be very rude. Just keep in mind "**prego**" is a way you can ask for someone to repeat.

Use #4: "I Insist" or "By All Means"

This is a usage of "prego" that we may employ when someone is being hesitant and you want to encourage them. In these instances you can definitely use "prego".

If you are a tourist at a tourist information center and you would like to take one of the handouts but you're not sure if you can do that, if they're free, whatever, then you could ask **"Can I take it?"** and they are probably going to reply **"please do"**.

How is this going to sound in Italian? How do we say **"can I take it?"** That would be **"Posso prenderlo?"** - **"Can I take it?"** And if they want to reply "please do" they're going to say **"Prego, prego"** - **"please, please do"**.

So "prego" can also be used to mean **"please, by all means, go ahead, please do"** - that's another usage of "prego".

My Quick Trick to Distinguish Between These Uses

Now we have learned four surprising usages of "prego" besides "you're welcome". The problem is: how are you going to distinguish between them? Here is my quick trick - you need to pay attention to the **intonation**.

Of course if someone says "grazie" and someone says "prego", you can be pretty sure they're saying "you're welcome".

If you hear "prego" with a **rising intonation** like **"prego?"** - can you see that the intonation is rising? There's a pitch that means **"pardon, can you repeat?"**

If instead you hear "prego" with **emphasis** like **"prego!"** then they're prompting you to go ahead, to do something, they're telling you **"please, after you"**.

That's my quick trick: pay attention to the intonation of "prego" and that's going to help you tremendously in real life.

Conclusion

Now you know the four surprising usages of "prego". Next time you will hear this word in a real Italian conversation you will understand exactly what it means in that context and you will sound like a native Italian speaker.

And for a deeper dive into this topic, don't forget to watch the accompanying video on my YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Atpjzm2bfXs>

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