# "ITANGLIANO" OR THE LOSS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY OF THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE

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*Abstract: The present paper aims to discuss matters related to the influence of English upon other idioms and to focus on the Italian language, as well as to present the antagonistic attitudes towards the process of borrowing words of English origin in Italian and the outcome of this process. It also illustrates the opinions of linguists, journalists and laymen about the possibility of Italian losing its own identity as a language in front of the "avalanche" of English loan-words.*

*Key words: avalanche, English, national identity, Italian, attitude.*

## Attempts to define the so-called "Itangliano"

The word "Itangliano" was used for the first time in the 1970s by Giacomo Elliot[1] (more exactly, in 1977) to indicate a "highly anglicized Italian". The phenomenon was later on approached by other linguists, one of them being Arrigo Castellani[2] in his article "Morbus anglicus" which appeared in the magazine *Studi linguistici italiani* in the late 1980s, more exactly in 1987.

In his article, Andrea Viviani[3] (2012) attemps to define the concept "Itangliano" by arguing that the strong influence of English upon the Italian language has led to the formation of the concept. This influence was exercised through the "massive occurrence" of English words and elements (like prefixes and suffixes) in Italian (both adapted and non-adapted forms).

Leslie Ray[4] has become famous for his article "Italiano moribondo, l'assassino è inglese" whose title is clear enough and it bluntly expresses the author's position related to English and its influence upon Italian. Ray uses the coined word *italiese* to refer to the fact that "la lingua sta diventando inglese, puro e semplice". His statement comes after the presentation of three passages from Italian articles in which the predominant words seem to be the English ones. He sees *italiese* as a forcible attempt of infiltrating English words in the Italian vocabulary. Most native speakers of Italian, among which linguists, translators and even laymen, have included in their vocabulary and frequently use the word *anglicizzazione* to refer to the "avalanche" of English loanwords or loan translations (calques) that have entered the Italian language and Ray is not an exception.

Tania Botticella (2007) perceives the current "itangliano" as a newly formed language. What she means, actually, is that English is sometimes wrongly used by the Italian people, which leads to the feeling that it is all about a new language, a sort of misguided childish approach to both languages (McArthur 2002: 155). Moreover, Botticella (2007) refers to *itangliano* as a potential "language", a hybridized language, *Italian English* which seems to enjoy an increased popularity among the Italians nowadays.

Tom McArthur (2002: 155) also makes use of *itangliano*, whom he chooses to explain as a "highly Anglicized Italian" or rather as "a blend in Italian of *italiano* and *anglo*".

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[1] His presumed pseudonym was Roberto Vacca, according to Beppe Severgnini (2010:148) apud http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki.itanglese (consulted on 02.05.2014).
[2] Italian linguist and philologist.
[3] Italian linguist and professor at Università degli Study Roma Tre in Rome.
[4] A free-lance translator, as he refers to himself in his article "Italiano moribondo…"



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*Itangliano* is "an amusing cultural and linguistic phenomenon" which "does not deserve serious consideration by linguististic scholars". To reinforce her idea, Dunlop (1989) refers to the Anglicization of Italian as "bastardization by English".

**"Itangliano" and other related coined terms**

"Itangliano" is the most frequent of all the mixed terms which indicate the presence of Italian and English in the Italian discourse. Among others, there are: *italiaricano*, *itanglese*, *italiese*[5], *itenglish* (Schweickard 2006: 562), *italienglish*, but, as it has already been said, *itangliano* is the most prevalent reference to the phenomenon (Trifone (2007) *apud* Viviani (2010); Rosati (2004: 21); Pulcini (2002: 154). There are also several linguists and media people who refer to *itangliano* as *l'italiano anglicizzato*, about which some authors say it is a wanted and labored mixture of the two languages (Viviani 2012). The before mentioned author insists on the fact that this mixed language can be only used by those with some knowledge of English, which is not always the case, though.

*Itanglese* or *itangliano* is defined in Aldo Gabrielli's *Grande dizionario italiano* as "la lingua italiana usata in certi contesti ed ambienti, caratterizata da un ricorso frequente ed arbitrario a termini e locuzioni inglesi", which somehow limits the uses of such a mixed language, since the author points out only some contexts and environments when *itangliano* may be used.

A similar restriction of usage appears in Botticella (2007), who tries to explain *Italian English* as "the form of language used in interpersonal and informal communication amongst Italians".

*Itangliano* is a language perpetually "in motion", a language that is continuously being formed (Dardano 1986 *apud* Botticella 2007) which is mainly due to the constant influence exercised by English upon Italian.

From a linguistic point of view, *itangliano* and *italiese* are used "derogatorily to denote spoken or written styles which contain many Anglicisms" (Pulcini 2002: 154).

In their attempt to better explain the phenomenon, Garzone (2005) and Pavesi (2006) use concepts like *doppiaggio*, which might also make reference to the semantics of Italian words that have gained another meaning due to the English influence. One of the examples provided by the authors belongs to the field of computer science: *salviamo un file*. The verb *salvare* has enriched its meaning, and it has come to also indicate *archiviare*. The English loanword *file* is becoming more frequent and popular than the Italian *documento*. A second example of *itangliano* provided by the same authors is related to adapting or translating English phrases in Italian without considering the already existing phrase in the recipient language. Thus phrases like *fare sesso* or *prendersi il proprio tempo* seem to surpass the use of the Italian *fare (al)l'amore* and *fare con comodo/ calma*.

The coined word "Itangliano" is not an isolated case since it can be related to other languages being "invaded" by English loanwords and loan translations. It is a *replica* of the previously coined compound "Franglais"[6] (French + English). Other examples: "Spanglish" (Spanish + English), "Singhlese" (Sinhala + English), "Chinglish" (Chinese + English), "Denglish", "Denglisch" or "Germish" (German + English) and probably many others indicate that English has become a globalizing language which has had a strong impact upon other idioms.

The current influence of English upon Italian is manifested through both oral and written forms of communication. If in the past, the prevalent form was the oral one (in the absence of any common form of communication in writing), it was further on replaced by

[5] A compound which appears in Ray's article "Italiano moribondo…"
[6] Coined and described by Etiemble (1964) apud Stochiţoiu Ichim (2006: 9).



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written sources (among which the prevalent was the press). Nowadays both means are in use (the most dominant are by far the media).

**Attitudes towards the „trend" of English loanword acquisition**

Very few are the **positive attitudes** expressed by linguists, writers or highly trained people in the field of linguistics. These optimistic perspectives towards English are founded on several criteria: the age of the speakers (most of them are teenagers and young adults), the interest (to impress the others through the use of English in their discourse), the workplace (in the case of businessmen, for example, or people involved in the media, advertising or employed by international companies). All the named criteria and many others might indicate that the use of this idiom denotes a rather cosmopolitan and modern approach to English and the English people, culture and mentality, which makes Italian people feel attracted to them.

**Moderate attitudes** refer to the fact that one should neither exaggerate in borrowing English words nor firmly oppose the phenomenon. This is the position adopted by most linguists who argue in favor of the evolution of any language, acknowledging that *to evolve* implies "sacrifices" translated as acceptance and tolerance regarding the process of borrowing words into the recipient language. Italian, like any other language, is in a constant and perpetual motion, changing in time, process which prevents it from becoming an extinct and dead language.

Italian's open attitude towards English has made it be called a "democratic" rather than an "introvert" language, like German or French (Pulcini 1997: 81).

Due to the morphological and phonetic assimilation process, words borrowed were adapted to the target language (Italian) and this has led to avoiding using a „creolized language", a language which lacks its national and cultural identity. One such example would be words like *una bistecca* (engl. *beef-steak*).

There are far more examples of hybrid words in Italian, which have come (to a certain extent, especially in specialized field) to replace the regular Italian verbs. We only mention some of them, found on *wikipedia* and other websites: *schedulare* [*schedule* (English) + *are* (Italian)] to replace the common form *pianificare, programmare*; *splittare* [*split* (English) + *are* (Italian)] – *dividere*; *switchare* [ *switch* (English) + *are* (Italian)] – *commutare, scambiare*; *matchare* [*match* (English) + *are* (Italian)] – *abbinare*; *quittare* [*quit* (English) + *are* (Italian)] – *uschire, chiudere* and so on.

The **negative attitudes** towards English are the most prevalent of all, and need therefore to be thoroughly discussed. This mixture of feelings among which resentment, anger, displeasure, animosity, hostility and also fright in front of and towards the English people and language is experienced by the so-called "purists". They are the defenders of the language, whose belief is that English should be perceived as a negative and deleterious source of vocabulary for the Italian lexicon. The reason for this conviction is that English is a threat to the national identity of Italian, which will eventually lead to the debilitation of the target or recipient language (Italian). They are very firm in expressing their position towards the English influence. Some of the purists are very convinced that it is better to forbid the use of such words, conviction dating back to the times of Mussolini.

Negative attitudes reside in the effort to "build a solid national identity" of Italy, in an attempt to cast aside any form of corruption coming from the English people or language. When we speak of these steady positions reaching the extreme, we can for sure refer to Mussolini and fascism. This current took hold of Italy in the early 1920s. Pulcini (1997: 80) emphasized the high ideals of Mussolini which made him adopt such extreme measures: "Fascism transformed existing rhetorical and literary concerns into a xenophobic campaign". Back then, starting with the 1920s, the national laws forbade the use of foreign words and



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phrases (English included) from the public street signs, ads and media. Anyone who failed to obey these very strict regulations was either fined or imprisoned (Dardano – Trifone 2001: 98).

On a higher and more elaborated level, a series of efforts and attempts have been made by academics, politicians and media people to defend and protect Italian against the dominating force of English.

*Il neopurismo*, as the name indicates, is a more recent trend in the field of linguistics, whose founder was Bruno Migliorini. It appeared in the early 1930s and lasted up the 1950s. Compared to the restrictive ideas promoted by *purism*, the *neopurism* also takes into account the fact that Italian is an European language open to *internazionalismi* (international words occurring in more languages), being therefore impossible to oppose. What Migliorini emphasizes in exchange is the fact that more attention should be paid to the sector fields of the language and moreover to the literary language whose impact upon the standard language might be dramatic (Migliorini 1940: 47). What the promoters of this current want is more attention to be paid to calques (loan translations), substitutes and also to loanwords. Some of the criteria mentioned by the group of neopurists were: the tendency to evolution of the words, the need for clarity, univocity and also lexical renewal.

A more modern neopurist, in the person of Arrigo Castellani, suggested a number of short-lived and unsuccessful substitutions and adapted forms of Anglicisms in Italian. We only mention some of them: *fubbia* [*fu*(*mmo*) + (*ne*)*bbia*] for *smog* [*smo*(*ke*) + (*fo*)*g*], *intredima* for *weekend*, *guardabimbi* for *baby-sitter*, *ubino* for *hobby*, *guisco* for *whisky* and so on. The main reason for their lack of success presumably was the fact that most of them have started to be considered as internationalisms, which points out that they are now commonly used on a global level in many different languages.

Other defenders of the Italian language, besides the purists and the neopurists, have proven more permissive regarding the borrowing phenomenon and instead of completely opposing the process they chose to suggest the replacement of English words with a substitute of the target language (Giovanardi, Gualdo & Coco 2008). Despite that belief, there are cases when it is almost impossible to find a substitute of the original words or phrases since they have become international and widely used. Some examples of words which might be hard or even impossible to replace are: PIN (*Personal identity number*), *facebook*, *e-mail*, even if there have been some attempts in this directions. Linguists have, for example, suggested the substitute *chiocciolina* for *e-mail*, but the suggestion was doomed from the beginning due to its long and heavy form.

Ray (2004), in his ironic and humorous story, presents the tragic fate of Italian, which is eventually "murdered" by English. The author tries to put the murder scene under a different light and refer to the tragic moment as to a "suicidio assistito" (an assisted/ witnessed suicide) of Italian, whom he perceives and presents as a victim (*la vittima l'italiano*). Its death might be a slow, twisting (*strisciante*) and agonizing one. He makes use of different negative means to refer to the lot (fate) of Italian, out of which the most frequent is *melodramma*.

Ray is not the only one who blames the process of globalization for the slow "death" of other languages, Italian included. Some of the antagonistic reasons for the use of English loanwords are mentioned in Ray's sad and emotional story: the wish to impress the others with the knowledge of English or the fear or anguish that "one might miss the train", which presumably means that since everyone makes use of such foreign words why should we not follow their example and avoid being isolated from the rest of the society. The two feelings mentioned can, to a certain extent, be translated as enthusiasm and panic.

Ray refers to his own language in such a lovely manner, calling it "la dolce, musicale lingua di Dante Aligheri", "la bella lingua", while English is perceived rather as a



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"murderer" (*assassino*), "the invader" (*invasore*). As one approaches the end of his article, one cannot fail to notice a change in the tone of the writing, and also a change of perspectives. He now uses phrases like "un orrenda lingua" (a form of expression found in Vincenzo Consolo[7]), pointing to what Italian has become after having been "invaded" by English.

The conclusion of Ray's article illustrates a medical case, in the sense that although Italian has lost its "linfa vitale", its evolution being arrested by English, there is still hope which is personified in the shape of Italian dialects which might revive the Italian language through periodical and regular transfusions. The optimistic tone turns pessimistic again when the author says that no transfusion will prove helpful as long as "la colpa fatale" has already stricken. The idea of isolation, or better said the fright of being excluded, of becoming a recluse from society for not following the trend is also recurrent in other Italian linguists.

There is a website with a very eloquent, teasing and provocative title, from which anyone can deduce the editor's position towards the English influence, namely stopitanglese.it. The motto of the website is rather allusive: *Italiani si nasce, Itanglesi si diventa*, and it presumably points out the distress of the author in front of the large number of people who tend to adopt such a hybrid form of communication. Massimo Arcangeli[8] states that this "Anglofilia forse inoffensive ma superflua e pretenziosa" has led to identifying that the most fearful adversaries and enemies of Italian are the Italians themselves.

In the end, there were maybe those strict and forbidding measures, laws and restrictions that made the Italian people (immediately after the fall of fascism) become so fond of the English culture, language, attitude (sometimes nonconformist) and people.

*Itangliano* has eventually become an accepted and intrinsic form of communication, despite the fact that authors like Crystal refer to these mixtures of languages as being characterized by a great complexity and subtlety of expression.

**In conclusion**, it is appropriate to say that only time can decide upon the fate of Italian and *itangliano*, respectively, since there will always be never-ending controversies on the topic.

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[7] A Sicilian writer.

[8] Linguist, professor, letterary critic and writter, director of Osservatorio della Lingua Italiana Zanichelli.



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