THE PHENOMENON OF BORROWING WORDS FROM ENGLISH INTO ITALIAN AND VICE-VERSA

Liliana Florina ANDRONACHE*
Roxana Corina SFETEA*

Abstract: *The paper aims to show that the process of borrowing words is a twofold one. It is very likely for two languages that come into contact to borrow words from each other. For sure there is no regulation that is against this process, as there is none which states that both languages should borrow the same number of loanwords. This latter idea is rather impossible, given the status and nature of some languages, e.g. Italian, which is more conservative than Romanian or other Romance languages when it comes to borrowing and adapting words of foreign origin.*

Keywords: *loan-words, reciprocity, language.*

Despite the difference between languages and their belonging to different language families[1], there has been a close relation and contact[2] between the British and the Italians (also called Anglo-Italian relations) based on alliance, financial assistance, interchange of students studying in the two countries, tourism, industry and so on[3].

Similarly, the relations between the US and Italy are based on friendship, along with diplomatic, economic, governmental and, nonetheless, cultural connections[4].

Nevertheless, the relationship between the two languages is not limited to such fields, it also exists in linguistics. There has been a recurrent idea that languages have enlarged their vocabulary through the acquisition of relatively different numbers of words from other languages. This phenomenon is referred to as self-evident and it is perceived as a possible consequence of either conquests or contact between languages (R.W. Burchfield in the *Foreword* to Görlach 2001: vii).

Studies and inquiries have been conducted on how English has influenced other languages due to the large or small number of English words borrowed by other languages at some point, but not too many studies on English being linguistically influenced by other languages[5]. Therefore, this is the purpose of the present paper, i.e. to present more on the two-fold relation between English and Italian.

Along its path, in order to become what is now called "a lingua franca" or "global English" as Crystal (2003: 123) and other linguists refers to it, English has come

* The University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Carol Davila", Bucharest, androna che.liliana@yahoo.com
* The University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Carol Davila", Bucharest, rsfetea@yahoo.com

[1] "A language family is a group of languages related through descent from a common ancestor, called the proto-language of that family" (www.wikipedia.org). Thus, Romanian belongs to Romance languages (also called Latin languages, Romanic or Neo-Latin languages) whose language of origin is Latin, while English belongs to the West Germanic languages.

[2] "Contact [...] dating back to the thirteen century, in the form of occasional exchanges between merchants and diplomats" (Pulcini 2002:151).

[3] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy%E2%80%93United_Kingdom_relations.

[4] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy%E2%80%93United_States_relations.

[5] A comprehensive study on this latter idea is a book by Crystal (2003), "English as a Global Language".

BDD-A24539 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:59:14 UTC)

in contact with many languages which it influenced and by which it was influenced, Italian being one of them.

English in Italian

Compared to other languages where "the intake of English lexis has been dramatic" (Görlach 2001: xv), Italian proved rather conservationist and, when not opposing loan-words, it tried to preserve their form, without any visible effort to adapt or integrate them.

As Crystal (2003: 124) suggests, there are two possibilities when coming in contact with another language: either to adopt and preserve an antagonistic attitude at a national level (and strongly oppose any attempt of borrowing or adopting words from the given language) or an ambivalent one (which refers to the coexistence of national antagonistic attitudes regarding the phenomenon of borrowing and adopting loanwords). Moreover, these two concepts (*antagonism* and *ambivalence*) clearly illustrate purist languages (antagonistic to any attempt) and more tolerant ones (which may refer to accepting the process of borrowing words due to the acknowledgement of its imminence).

Being much closer to purist languages than to very tolerant ones (but still not firmly opposing loanwords[6]), Italian has always been self-aware of its national and linguistic values which led to the preference of calques (it. *alta società* – engl. *high society*, it. *sedia elettrica* – engl. *electric chair*, it. *microonde* – engl. *microwave*[7]) and also free translations (it. *salto con l'elastico* – engl. *bungee jumping*) to loanwords. The latter are somehow considered a threat to those values and also to the national identity of the country. Some others acknowledge the importance and necessity of English as an international language, as a link to other people and peoples, but there is also a saying: "viva l'inglese, ma non dimentichiamoci delle nostre lingue madri[8]". It is clear that English is a language that facilitates communication, making it easier for the press to convey messages and ideas, that it is a "necessary evil" that one should learn how to cope with, but not abuse and overuse when it is not the case.

That is why instead of borrowing all names of sports, there are cases when such words were either calqued or rendered freely into Italian. Here are only a few examples[9]:

basketball (engl.) - *pallacanestro* (it.)
offroad (engl.) - *fuori strada* (it.)
supermarket (engl.) – *supermercato* (it.)
videogame (engl.) – *videogioco* (it.)
volleyball (engl.) - *palla a volo* (it.)

[6] As Pulcini (2002: 152) re-enforces, "integration and adaptation are not necessarily linked". Therefore, as it happened to Italian, most English loanwords were borrowed, but only a few adapted to the linguistic system of the recipient language.
[7] The examples have been selected from Pulcini (2002: 161).
[8] In an article by Bucci Stefano called *Inglese <<nuovo latino>> anche per la Crusca*, published in "Corriere della Sera", consulted on 16th July 2015 at http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2001/maggio/07/Inglese_nuovo_latino_anche_per_co_0_010507 7813.shtml.
[9] The examples were extracted from http://www.byki.com/lists/italian/enrichment-sports.html and also selected from Andronache (2014: 164-170).

BDD-A24539 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:59:14 UTC)

water polo (engl.) - *pallanuoto* (it.)

Italian in English

The attitude that the English have towards the Italians is most often displayed in movies and on TV. It either praises the leaders of Italy or it is humoristic and jocular when it comes to imitating the way in which the Italians gesture as they talk.

In terms of linguistics, due to the Latinate origin of some English words, English is also predisposed to adopt Italian loanwords. From the examples below (under fields of activity), it can be deduced that English preserves the initial form of the words, with no effort to adapt them to its linguistic system (which is actually easier than that of a Romance language).

Fields of activity

Italian did not set a limit regarding the number of words borrowed from English nor regarding the fields from which to borrow words. Therefore, among the most frequent domains there are: **sports and games** (*bowling*, *derby*, *fitness*, *jogging*, *tennis*), **shopping and fashion** (*cool*, *look*, *mall*, *piercing*, *shopping*), **music and television** (*CD*, *DVD*, *free-style*, *jazz*, *reality-show*, *show*, *talk-show*), **food** (*burger*, *cheeseburger*, *cocktail*, *fast-food*, *junk food*) etc.

The pathway followed by Italian when it comes to borrowing from English does not focus only on specialized fields, as it happened with English. It also refers to the everyday speech, to including words of English origin in the vocabulary of almost every native speaker of Italian. Of course, the reasons differ from snobbism to prestige.

On the other hand, English has been more selective. Most of the words borrowed from Italian are related to food and beverages, most of them specific to **the Italian cuisine** and which will probably become international[10] words: *al dente*, *broccoli*, *bruschetta*, *mascarpone*, *mozzarella*, *pizza*, *polenta*, *risotto* (rice), *pesto*, *prosciutto* (ham), *salami*, *zucchini* and different types of *pasta*[11]: *carbonara*, *fusilli*, *linguine*, *lasagne*, *maccheroni*, *penne*, *ravioli*, *spaghetti* and *tortellini*. Among the sweets, *tiramisù* has become the most common and famous cake, while frequent beverages are *cappuccino*, *caffè macchiato*, *espresso* and *martini*.

English seems to confine the borrowing process to specialized fields only. There may be exceptions in the sense that Italian greetings might be included in an Englishman's discourse. If this is the case, the purpose is a very clear one, whose humoristic aim is either to make a good impression to the interlocutor or to make people laugh. Some examples are the well-known *Ciao!* and *Arrivederci!*

Some other specialized domains in which there may be found and used words of Italian origin are mainly **arts** and **architecture** (*cupola*, *piazza*) and **music** (*a cappella*, *alto*, *ballerina*, *basso*, *maestro* etc).

[10] An internationalism (ling.) or an international word "is a loanword that occurs in several languages with the same or at least similar meaning and etymology" and it is "the result of simultaneous or successive borrowings from the ultimate source" (I.V.Arnold *apud* www.wikipedia.org).

[11] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_cuisine.

BDD-A24539 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:59:14 UTC)

Conclusions

Despite their different descendance in the "family tree", the two languages under analysis (English and Italian) do not differ that much. They are both likely to adopt loanwords and they both tend to preserve the original form of the loanwords without assimilating it. Still, the differences occur due to the status of English (*the language of globalization, "a lingua franca*" etc.), which makes it influence other languages on the entire planet and, in turn, be slightly influenced only by some of them.

Bibliography

Andronache, L., *Asimilarea anglicismelor în română şi italiană. Studiu contrastiv*, Editura Ars Docendi, Bucureşti, 2014

Berlitz Editorial Staff (ed.), *Dictionary. Italian - English. English - Italian*, Berlitz Publishing, Munich, Singapore, 2004

Crystal, D., *English as a Global Language*, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003

Görlach, M. (ed.), *A Dictionary of European Anglicisms. A Usage Dictionary of Anglicisms in Sixteen European Languages (DEA)*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001

Pulcini, V., "Italian" in Görlach M. (ed.), *English in Europe*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 151-167.

Electronic resources

www.corriere.it (consulted between 10th-16th July 2015)

www.wikipedia.org (consulted on 28th June 2015)

BDD-A24539 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești

Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:59:14 UTC)