SPORTS LANGUAGE IN ITALIAN

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Abstract: The purpose of the present paper is to discuss the influence of English upon the names of sports and the sports language in Italian. The language under debate is among the purist languages, but despite that, it could not fully resist the strength of English words and it eventually either borrowed or translated some of the sports vocabulary in English.

Keywords: sport, English words, Italian, influence, purism

The phenomenon of borrowing words from English into Italian is neither isolated nor unique in linguistics, dating back to the thirteenth century (Pulcini 2002: 151) when merchants and diplomats exchanged goods occasionally and it is due to the contact between languages. Thus, there are languages that have become more influential than others.

Even if "l'influsso inglese comincia a farsi sentire in una certa misura solo in tempi relativamente recenti[1]" (Zolli 1976: 6 *apud* Holtus 1989: 279), it is highly visible at present in almost every field of communication. Words of English origin or Anglicisms are the proof that language is in a continuous process of renewal, of enrichment, "in continuo movimento[2]" since very few languages cease being used (as Latin did, for example).

There is an interesting opinion by Machiavelli quoted in the article by Holtus (1989: 279): "e da qui dipende che le lingue da principio arricchiscono e diventano più belle, essendo più copiose". We also share this idea or, better said, ideal, according to

[1] *"… the English influence has started being felt to a certain extent only in relatively recent times" (author's translation).*
[2] *The idea of a language being in a "continuous movement" is reiterated by Massimo Arcangeli in the Preface of Lo Zingarelli 2010. Vocabolario della lingua italiana, in an article called "Osservatorio della lingua italiana", p.3.*

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which the process of borrowing should enrich and beautify languages that borrow or translate words and phrases of different origins. Moreover, the new words should not replace the already existing ones, but should occur as alternatives in the process of communication and should therefore be used for the sake of avoiding repetitions or making the message conveyed better and easily understood.

Pfister (1986 *apud* Holtus 1989: 280) stresses the international importance of English as "a language of globalization" and the roles of Anglicisms in Italian, out of which the beneficial one is worth mentioning.

Even though "il processo di integrazione o accettazione è spesso un fenomeno di lunga durata[3]" as it happened with Anglicisms in Italian, they were eventually accepted one way or another, despite the manifestation of the purist trend, whose supporters considered English to be a threat to the value of their language and culture. Still, there are other linguists like Beccaria (1988 *apud* Pulcini 2002: 153) who perceive Italian as "a <<democratic language>>, open to neological borrowings from other languages". It could not have been otherwise, since English has become more and more influential in time (Holtus 1989: 282), sometimes referred to as "l'inglese di tutti[4]" (Petralli 1996: 84).

When it came to borrowing words from English, Italian has not been very open to it from the very beginning, not a "lingua accogliente[5]", as Petralli Alessio (1996: 23) calls it. Still, "it is open to what is new while at the same time preserving her firm roots in the past" (Beccaria 2002: 195), being a language that has not changed much, remaining close to its origins. In time, though, there were adopted several alternatives in terms of integrating the incoming words into the Italian linguistics system.

One of them refers to creating derivatives or compound words with the use of indigenous elements of the recipient language. As discussed by Della Valle (2009), "continua a mostrare grande vitalità la derivazione da basi verbali e nominali tramite l'aggiunta di suffissi e prefissi[6]".

Examples of derivatives, most of which are formed with suffixes:

bridgista – person who plays *bridge* (from *bridge* + - *ista*)

crossista – person who practices *ciclocross* or *motocross* (from *cross* + - *ista*)

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[3] *"... the integration or acceptance process is often a long-term phenomenon" (author's translation).*
[4] *" ... everyone's English" (author's translation).*
[5] *"... a welcoming language" (author's translation).*
[6] *"... derivatives from verbal and nominal bases by adding suffixes and prefixes continues to display a great vitality" (author's translation).*

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dribblare – from *to dribble* + *-are*

footbalino – table football (from *football* + *- ino*)

hockeista – hockey player (from *hockey* + *-ista*)

manageriale - from *manager* + *-iale*

rugbista – rugby player (from *rugby* + *-ista*)

stoppare – from *to stop* + *-are*

Examples of compounds with indigenous forms:

palla-gol

The word *goal* in the compound above underwent phonetic assimilation, therefore becoming *gol*, while the Italian word *palla* replaces the English *ball*.

The other two refer to loanwords and loan-translations. A good definition of both is given by Holtus (1989: 298) whose thoughts and ideas were influenced by Scheler (1973: 19ss) and Ebel (1856): "il prestito" represents "il passaggio di una parola straniera in un'altra nella sua forma e nel suo significato[7]", while the calque refers to "alla riproduzione di parole straniere mediante il materiale lessicale della lingua ricevente[8]".

Examples of loanwords, most of which have been taken from a comprehensive list of sports, entitled *Sport dalla A alla Z*, consulted on the website http://www.ti-sport.ch/2-ev-ti/1-a-z/1-a-z_corpo-sin.html, since not all of them have been included in the Italian dictionaries yet.

anti-doping

autogol

base jumping[9]

basket[10]

beach-soccer

beach-tennis

beach-volley

break

bungee-jumping[11]

[7] *"... the borrowing represents the passage of a foreign word's form and significant to another".*
[8] *"... the reproduction of foreign words through the lexical material of the recipient language".*
[9] *Parachuting launch from buildings/ bridges.*
[10] *Zanichelli (2010: 259) registers basket with reference to the sport, for which the lexicographers suggest the loan-translation pallacanestro.*

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badminton

baseball

bowling

bridge

biker[12]

(mountain) biking

club

cricket

corner

cross

curling[13]

derby

doping

dribbling

fan

fault

finish

fitness

fair-play

football

free-style

game

goal

golf

hands

jogging

jet-ski

knock-out

minigolf

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[11] *Bungee jumping appears with an incorrect spelling on the website listing all names of sports from A to Z, e.g. bungy-jumping, whose spelling might have been influenced by the pronounciating of the first word in the compound.*

[12] *A rider of a bicyle or a motorcycle.*

[13] *Curling is a sport in which players slide stones on a sheet of ice towards a target area which is segmented into four concentric circles (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curling).*

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mountain bike

mountain biking

motocross[14]

outsider

pole-position

paragliding

playoff

penalty

ping-pong

playout

performance

pressing

raid

record

ring

rugby

rafting[15]

score

start

set

skate-board

snowboard

skating

smash[16]

sprinter

surf-boat

team

time-out

tennis

windsurf[17]

[14] *A form of off-road motocyle racing.*
[15] *Rafting is a recreational outdoor activity which uses an inflatable raft to navigate a river or other waters.*
[16] *Tennis hit.*
[17] *Windsurf refers to both the sport and the device used to practice the sport.*

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windsurfing[18]

wrestling

wakeboard

wakeboarding[19]

Very few words in the list above underwent phonetic assimilation. A good example is *autogol*, from the English form *autogoal*. In the case of compounds, either the whole compound undergoes phonetic and graphic assimilation or only part of it does, in which case we can speak of partial assimilation. A good example is *ciclocross*, graphically adapted from the English form *cyclocross* (which is a form of bicycle racing). Some of the loanwords are commonly used in phrases: *fare un break* as for example in a tennis game. Still, in the category of loanwords, it is worth mentioning *break-dance*, which can surely be included under the heading music & dancing.

There is this idea that the names of foreign sports should be preserved as they occur in their language of origin, because otherwise they might "corrupt" the national language (Beccaria 2006: 156): *tennis*, *golf*, *poker*, *bridge*. This idea is strengthened by others, among which "America is the home of baseball[20]" etc. or, in other words, there are sports specific to some countries, as for example *soccer* to America, and that is why whenever translated into another language, it becomes "American calcio" and so on. Still, some foreign or international names of sports might sometimes be used less frequently than their Italian equivalents.

Examples of total loan-translations:

centrocampista – centerfielder

centravanti/ centrattaco – centerforward

ciclocampestre – cyclocross

disco su ghiaccio – ice hockey

lotta libera – free fight

pallamano - handball

pallacanestro – basketball

pallanuoto – water polo

pallavolo – volleyball

[18] *Windsurfing refers only the sport.*
[19] *Wakeboarding is a surface water sport which involves riding a wakeboard over the surface of a body of water (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wakeboarding).*
[20] *In an article found on http://www.rocketlanguages.com/italian/learn/sports-in-italian/.*

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Examples of partial loan-translations:

golf ball – palla da golf

hockey su prato – field hockey

hockey su ghiaccio - ice hockey

parapendio – paragliding

tennistavolo/ tennis tavolo – table tennis

In the last category illustrated by means of few examples, the Italian phrase preserved the name of the sport in English (*golf*, *hockey*) and only translated the other components of the English phrase (*ball – palla, field – prato, ice – ghiaccio*).

It is also worth mentioning that there are also a lot of adapted words, despite the fact that "l'italiano sembri preferire l'adozione di prestiti integrali al meccanismo dell'adattamento[21]" (Della Valle 2009). There are various types of adaptation - a) phonetic : *gol* from *goal*, b) morphological (as for example, when the gender is changed): *jogger*, *supporter* etc. – both female and male in Italian.

Massimo Arcangeli, in the same Preface to *Lo Zingarelli 2010. Vocabolario della lingua italiana* (p.4) states that loanwords of different origins are "selezionati come sempre con grande cura (perché non si dica un giorno che si trattava di <<effinerismi>> dettati da mode o gusti transeunti[22]". At first, the term "anglomania" was defined as a "fashion which was characterized by a fascination with English culture" (Graf 1911 *apud* Pulcini 2002: 151).

In the field of football, and not only, at the beginning of the 20th century, many English words started being replaced by Italian ones. Some suggestions are made for the sake of protecting the mother tongue. For example, Gabrielli provides in his dictionary also the recommended form(s) to use next to the borrowed and adapted (or not) ones, by using the phrase "si dica" (to be said…). He is not the only one who provides suggestions and alternatives to replace the English loanwords. There are authors and linguists who despite acknowledging the disadvantages of gradually introducing foreign words (names of sports in this case) in a language, it is impossible not to do so, since otherwise that specific language (Italian in this case) would remain isolated from other languages which do so (Nencioni 1995: 6).

autogol – by *autorete*

[21] *"... Italian seems to prefer the adoption of integral borrowings to the mechanism of assimilation".*

[22] *"... selected with great care as they have always been (in order not to say one day that they were <<ephemeral words>> dictated by transient trends or tastes" (author's translation).*

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boxer – by *pugile*

centre-forward – by *centroattaco*

corner – by calcio d'angolo

dribbling/ dribblare – by *pallegiare*

football – by *calcio*

goal-keeper – by *portiere*

heading – by *gioco di testa*

match – by *partita*

offside – by *fuori gioco*

penalty – by *rigore*

trainer – by *allenatore*

team – by *squadra*

ping pong – by *tennis tavolo*

In order to make a **conclusion**, despite the enormous efforts made by most Italians not to include words of English origin in their vocabulary, when it comes to sports it seems quite impossible to avoid them, since they are more concise and explicit than the Italian phrases or explanations that might substitute them in speech and also make reference to sports which are not specific to Italy and Italians only, but which have become or tend to become popular worldwide.

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