

## AUSTRALIAN LOAN-WORDS IN WRITTEN STANDARD ITALIAN <sup>1</sup>

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In the period between the two world wars the name 'Australia' supplanted that of 'America' in the imagination of Italians who contemplated migration and an upsurge of interest in Australia and things Australian became generally manifest in Italy.

Many of the facts about Australia which became general knowledge about this time, were, however, not exactly new to the Italian scene, as the presence of Australian loan-words in Italian from the end of the eighteenth century onwards demonstrates.

These loans are by no means numerous and have come into the language through the intermediary of English. They are all nouns which refer to the ethnological and biological features of the Island Continent, with the exception of *boomerang*, *canguro*, and the Sicilian *bbillicannu*, which have undergone some semantic changes.

The presence of Australian loans in standard Italian is to be noticed largely in written material with Australian content. Since the loans are introduced mainly at the written level, the process of their assimilation into the language is slow and incomplete. There is a tendency to retain the original spelling of words which refer to Australian plants and animals even when the word contains consonant or vowel groups inadmissible in Italian spelling and pronunciation, or where the word has a consonant ending which makes it difficult to fit into the Italian morphological system (*kobona*, *wombat*).

Some writers (notably Bellotti) consistently use the English plural in -s for words ending in a consonant (*wombats*). This tendency to use the plural in -s may also be extended to words which could potentially take an Italian-type plural<sup>2</sup>, possibly because the exotic colouring normally associated with these words excludes them from being treated morphologically in the same fashion as ordinary Italian words. Only *canguro*, in fact, which has by and large lost this exotic colouring and is the oldest and the most widely-used Australian loan, may be considered to be perfectly assimilated in the Italian morphological system.

When dealing with aspects of the Australian scene such as social life and politics there is a tendency to translate the relevant terminology; thus 'bar-maid' becomes *la barista*, the 'Commonwealth of Australia' *Confederazione australiana*, the 'Country Party' *il Partito agrario*, 'leader of the opposition' *capo dell'opposizione*. These are words which, in any case, already existed in English and may have taken on a special meaning in the Australian context. For many of these, Italian had already established suitable transfer patterns from the English.

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- 1 In order to determine the number and type of Australian loan-words in Italian, it was thought advisable to examine a sampling of published volumes dealing with Australia which have had general appeal to the Italian reading public, rather than examine technical or scientific works which would have appealed to a limited number of specialist readers or to examine material of a periodical nature which often contains words of ephemeral penetration. The words found in the volumes examined were then checked in the Italian dictionaries, in which were found a number of words of Australian origin not documented in the sample material.
- 2 The plural of *goanna* is normally *goannas*, although sometimes *goane* (with change of gender from masc. to fem.) is found. The plural of *dingo* varies between *i dingo* and *i dingos* (a true Italian-type plural would be *\*i dinghi*).



A few Australian-English words (e.g. Sicilian *tinnu* and *scioppe*<sup>3</sup>) have also been imported into some dialects by returning migrants. Since these words have been introduced largely by oral means, they take the form and endings characteristic of the dialects. Among these words we find *bbillicannu* (< *billy-can*)<sup>4</sup> which is used in the islands of Salina and Filicudi in N.E. Sicily with the meaning of 'a pot in which food is carried'.

The first appearance of Australian words in Italian would seem to be in Cook 1784, an anonymous adaptation of Cook's *Voyages*. The loan-words found in this adaptation are the same ones originally used by Cook in his description of the flora, the fauna and the natives of *Nuova Galles Meridionale* (the adapter's translation for New South Wales).<sup>5</sup> Where Cook has borrowed an aboriginal word to designate the object he is describing, the adapter has reproduced the terminology in the original (*Kanguroo*; *Quoll*; *Carabanda*), and he even reproduces, in part, Cook's glossary of aboriginal words, giving the Italian equivalents of the English translation. Aboriginal names (*Yaparico*) and expressions (*Wageegee*) also receive the same treatment with one very minor exception: *cherceau*, instead of the original *chercau*. On the other hand, where Cook has used English words or phrases, these have been translated into Italian: *bastone da scagliare* 'throwing stick'; *cavolo palmista* 'cabbage tree' (the *Corypha australis*).

An Italian traveller in England in 1789 must have been loosely translating the expression 'transported to Botany Bay' when he writes in his letters about convicts who are *trasportati alla costa di Botany Bay*.<sup>6</sup>

Italian immigrants began to settle in Australia as early as 1846 while Italian ships began to call regularly in Australian ports after 1851. In 1855, the members of a small group of Italian missionaries sent to the islands of Rook and Woodlark were consistently using the name *Australia*<sup>7</sup> to refer to the collection of British colonies established on the continent whereas prior to and immediately after their arrival in the area they had used the name *Nuova Olanda*<sup>8</sup> 'New Holland'<sup>9</sup>. Towards the end of the 19th century, the name *Australia* was being used in Italy, although rarely, as a christian name for girls.

3 Rando 1967:31.

4 Tropea 1963:172, Rando 1967:32.

5 The adapter, in fact, attempts to find some sort of translation for most of the place-names, thus he uses consistently: *Baja di Botannica* (Botany Bay); *Capo Bedford* (Cape Bedford); *Nuova Olanda* (New Holland); *punta Look-Out* (*Vista Esterna*) (Look-Out Point). Even 'The Endeavour' becomes *Lo Sforzo*!

6 Angiolini 1942:36.

7 Suigo 1965:249,268.

8 Suigo 1965:210.

9 I am indebted to Dr H. M. Laracy, Department of History, Auckland University, for drawing my attention to the letters written by these missionaries which contain a number of words and expressions used by the natives of Rook and Woodlark. Particularly interesting are a few English phrases spoken by a native of New Georgia and documented in a letter written by P. Carlo Salerio dated, Woodlark, 4/12/1852: "Il figlio del Capo della Nuova Georgia, che era a bordo, strabigliava e battendomi la spalla: you have speek New Giorgie: By and by you New Giorgie; yes, ripeteva in cattivo inglese: Tu perli (sic) Nuova Georgia: a poco a poco tu Nuova Georgia: sì."



The Italian community in Australia during the 19th century was relatively minute and does not seem to have been instrumental in transmitting Australian loans to written standard Italian, although Australian loans may have been circulating in Sicilian towards the end of the century. A large number of terms relating to Australian phenomena, however, became part of the Italian scientists' vocabulary, especially the names of Australian plants (*eucalitto* 'eucalyptus'; *goodeniacee* 'goodeniaceae'; *spiridio* 'spyridium'), animals (*emu* 'Dromaeus novae hollandiae'; *potoro* 'potorous'; *principe reggente* 'prince regent bird') and minerals (*kalgoorlite*; *newberryite*; *pilbarrite*). Very few of these terms seem to have been known outside specialist scientific circles although the Italian translation of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (Darwin 1875) introduced the terms *bandicoots* and *coala* to the general reading public. The particularly primitive characteristics of the Australian flora and fauna inspired the loan translation *la terra dei fossili viventi* 'land of the living fossils', used to refer to Australia, especially in a biological context.

Notwithstanding the fact that a few books on Australia had been published in Italy from the end of the 19th century onwards, it was not until after the first world war, with the sharp increase in Italian migration to Australia, that direct contact between the two countries was established on a large scale and interest in Australia became widespread. Further words referring to Australian flora and fauna were documented (*karri*; *yarrah*; *kookaburra*) and some terms referring to Australian political and social life also put in an appearance (*Confederazione australiana*, — sometimes *Federazione Australiana*; *White Australia* — translated by *Bianca Australia*; *smoke-ho*<sup>10</sup>). A number of words which are of English origin but which have acquired different uses and different emphasis in Australia found their way into Italian because they had become familiar to the Italian migrants and were consequently used by Pascuale 1930, Nibbi 1937 and De Scalzo 1938, who dealt with aspects of migrant life in their books: *bas* 'bus'; *bosso* 'boss'; *farma* 'farm'; *ghenga* 'gang'.

During the 1930's, Italian writers, influenced by the Fascist *Campagna contro i forestierismi*, which tried to eliminate the use of foreign words in Italian, made an attempt to translate some typically Australian words — 'swags' by *ciambelle di coperte*; 'kookaburra' by *l'uccello che ride* — but these translations did not meet with any success and once the *Campagna* had gone out of fashion the original forms quickly reasserted themselves.

In the post-war period Italian seems to have increased its intake of Australian loan-words. Bellotti uses many words hitherto undocumented in Italian, in particular those which refer to out-back life: *Flying Doctor*; *station*; *track*. His description of the Aborigines includes several words which refer to aboriginal customs — *Malu*; *manu*; *ninyas*; *nugari*; *tjukurita*. On the whole, Bellotti seems rather unwilling to adapt or translate Australian expressions, his main efforts, apart from the traditionally established ones, being; *il Board delle uova del New South Wales* 'the N.S.W. Egg Board'; *Capitale federale* 'Federal Capital'; *Corte Federale d'Arbitraggio* 'Federal Arbitration Court'; *dottori volanti* 'Flying Doctors'; *partito agrario* 'Country Party'; but he retains *Commonwealth* throughout instead of translating by *Confederazione*.

Gentili, whose book is intended as an overall description of Australia for the intending migrant, tends to use Italian terminology whenever possible, although, when dealing with Australian institutions he usually gives the English equivalent in brackets: *uffici di collocamento* (*Employment Offices*); *scuole magistrali* (*Teachers Colleges*); *sindacati locali* (*Trade Unions*). The typically Australian terms used in the text are invariably explained either by the context or by an appropriate insertion: "Se si beve te e *billy tea* fatto sul lavoro"; "*digger* (in origine minatore, ora soldato)".

<sup>10</sup> De Scalzo 1938:90. The *h* is a graphic phenomenon, probably due to the author's somewhat uncertain command of English spelling. It is never pronounced in Australian Italian.



Nibbi 1965 tends to be more conservative in the use of loan-words and he usually attempts to assimilate them. Although he sometimes uses typically Australian expressions (*Nothing doing*), these occur only in the direct speech of his characters and are usually followed by their Italian translation. In any case most of Nibbi's stories deal with urban settings and consequently there is less scope for the use of words which may be considered typically Australian.

The above survey would seem to indicate that standard written Italian makes very limited use of Australian words. Apart from *bumerang* and *canguro* (see below), the use of Australian words in Italian is entirely restricted to what could be termed elements of local colour in that the Australianisms are used only in an Australian context, and consequently tend to be regarded as exotic words of marginal utility to the Italian vocabulary. It is a phenomenon which contrasts sharply with that of Australian Italian where, because of the close contact which exists between English and Italian in Australia, not only numerous items of vocabulary, but also certain syntactical constructions of Australian English are assimilated.

#### A list of Australian loan-words in Italian.

The following is a list of those Australian loan-words which may be considered as being fairly well-known to standard written Italian.

The morphological function of the loan in Italian is given in brackets after each word, together with the date and work in which the loan was first documented. The date given for words cited from Battisti & Alessio 1950 and Prati 1951 is the date of first appearance of the word as recorded by the compilers of these dictionaries. The asterisk is used to denote words which have been cited in the text of the article.

**Anzac** (masc.sb.) (pre-1918) Panzini 1918:27. The definition given by Panzini is: '*Sigla inglese: Australian and New Zealand Army Corps = Corpo di spedizione australiano e neozelandese*'. Italian also makes use of the plural *gli Anzac* 'soldiers who fought in the Aust. and N.Z. Army Corps during World War I'. The word may also be used as an adjective cf. De Scalzo 1938:83.

**bandicoots\*** (pl.masc.sb.) (1875) Darwin 1875:393. The reference is to the rat-like *Parameles*, an insectivorous Australian marsupial.

**bas\*** (masc.sb.) (1938) De Scalzo 1938:91. An adaptation of 'bus' used in Australian Italian. De Scalzo's transcription is, however, not exact since the word is usually written (and pronounced) *basse*.

**billabong** (masc.sb.) (1952) Gentilli 1952:97. There seem to be two meanings given to this word in Italian: 'a pool formed in the course of a stream' Gentilli 1952:97 and 'a pool formed by rain-water' Bellotti 1967:36,37. Pl. — *billabongs* Bellotti 1967:133.

**billy tea\*** (masc.sb.) (1952) Gentilli 1952:50. Tea made out in the open, in a billy. Gentilli distinguishes this from the teapot variety which he calls *tè*.

**blue gum** (masc.sb.) (1967) Bellotti 1967:60. The tree *Eucalyptus globulus*, native to Victoria and Tasmania.

**bumerang\*** (masc.sb.) (pre-1892) Prati 1951:183. A throwing weapon, used by the natives of Australia, which returns to the thrower if it does not hit the target. *Bumerang* is the more com-



only used form in present-day Italian, although the original form of the loan *boomerang* (masc.sb.) (c.1875) is also sometimes used. *Bomerang* (masc.sb.) (a.1905) is now no longer in use. Jàcono 1942:45 indicates that the word is found used in a non-Australian context with the meaning of 'words or actions which are used to the detriment of their original instigator'. In the light of the *campagna contro i forestierismi* then current, it is interesting to note Jàcono's argument for the retention of the word in Italian: 'Ora, poiché il termine australiano non è efficacemente sostituibile in italiano...noi proporremo di ridurre l'esotismo a forma italianizzante più plausibile: che può essere *bomerango* o *bumerango*....', but neither one of these suggested adaptations were used.

**bushranger** (masc.sb.) (1930) Enciclopedia 1930:433. An Australian outlaw.

**coala\*** (masc.sb.) (1875) Darwin 1875:393. The 'koala-bear' (*Phascolarctos cinereus*). The original form *koala* (masc.sb.) (1930) is now much more widely used than the adaptation.

**cigno nero** (masc.sb.) (1910) Zunini 1910:78. Translation of the term *black swan* (*Cygnus atratus*).

**digger\*** (masc.sb.) (1952) Gentilli 1952:97. "Originally meant 'a miner', now means 'a soldier'".

**dingo** (masc.sb.) (pre-1918) Panzini 1918:138. A wild dog native to Australia (*Canis dingo*).

**emu\*** (masc.sb.) (a.1874) Prati 1951:394. An Australian bird similar to the ostrich. The term is generally used to refer to *Dromaeus novae hollandiae*, although it may sometimes be used to refer to any bird which belongs to the *Dromaeidae* family. The form *emù* (a.1892) Prati 1951:394, is now commonly used.

**eucalitto\*** (masc.sb.) (a.1828) Prati 1951:403. Denotes the trees of the genus *Eucalyptus* ( $\underline{Y} > \underline{i}$  and  $PT > tt$  are standard transfer patterns for the transliteration of words of Greek origin in Italian). Italian also makes use of the partial adaptations *eucalipto* Battisti & Alessio 1950:1562 and *eucaliptus* Panzini 1918:215. Another name for the *eucalyptus* trees used by writers who have personally visited Australia is *alberi di gomma* (pl.masc.sb.) (1852) Suigo 1965:215, and *gommi* (pl.masc.sb.) (1867) Carboni 1867:112, which respectively translate the Australian terms 'gum trees' and 'gums'.

**farma\*** (fem.sb.) (1930) Pascuale 1930: passim. The term is used almost universally by Australian Italians with the meanings of 'dairy or vegetable farm', 'banana, pineapple or sugar-cane plantation', sometimes 'sheep or cattle station', and replaces the Italian terms 'fattoria, latifondo, podere'. The original word *farm* (De Scalzo 1938:308) may sometimes be used in the written language. The derivative *farmista* (masc.sb.) (Nibbi 1937:228) is also widely used. The words *farma* and *farmista*, referred to Australia, are found in certain parts of Sicily (notably, in a few villages in the provinces of Messina and Trapani). In standard Italian, however, the words *farm* and *farma* may be used to refer to different types of farm in other English-speaking countries, and not just in Australia.

**galàh** (pl.masc.sb.) (1910) Zunini 1910:81. A native bird of Australia similar to a parrot – the reference is to the *Cacatua roseicapilla*. The same bird is given the name *cacatua rosso* (masc.sb.) in Enciclopedia 1930:408. It is also possible that the term *katacova* in Cook 1784:71 may refer to the galah.

**kanguroo\*** (masc.sb.) (1784) Cook 1784:60, and the variant *kangooroo* (masc.sb.) (a.1787) Prati 1951:213, were eventually replaced by the adaptation *canguro* (masc.sb.) (a.1839) (Battisti



& Alessio 1950:719), which is the only form used in modern Italian (pl. — *canguri*). The formation and widespread acceptance of this adaptation would seem to be aided by popular etymology since the first syllable *can* (a commonly-used truncation for *cane* 'dog') immediately tends to link the word with the denotation of an animal.

As a zoological term, *canguro* is used to denote the animals of the *Macropodidae* family<sup>11</sup> and may be considered the Italian equivalent of English *kangaroo*, but the word has also been subject to a number of semantic variations in modern Italian. The phrase *Canguri giganti* was used during the last phase of World War II by the government of the Republic of Salò to denote those who had accepted help from that government and had then gone over to the enemy. From at least 1950 *canguro* has been used with the meaning of 'a person who is promoted over someone else's head because of nepotism or favouritism'. *Aereo canguro* is the name given to a plane which carries another smaller plane to a predetermined height and then launches it. The magazine *Oggi*, (no. 46, 1968) carried an advertisement for a *tappeto canguro*: a mat with a small box in the middle designed to be fitted on the floor in the front part of a car — the box is used to keep within easy reach of the driver various objects such as maps, sun glasses etc. Recently (since 1960?) the word *canguro* has been used to denote an Italian who has spent several years in Australia.

**karri\*** (masc.sb.) (1930) Enciclopedia 1930. The tree, *Eucalyptus diversicolor*.

**kobong\*** (masc.sb.) (1905) Prati 1951:559. The animal or plant from which the Australian native obtains his name.

**kookaburra\*** (masc.sb.) (1938) De Scalzo 1938:195. The name by which *Dacelo gigas* is known in Italy. Attempts to replace this word — *uccello che ride* De Scalzo 1938:203; *cassico* and *tordi beffeggiatori* Santucci 1947:82 — have met with little success.

**mulga** (masc.sb.) (1930) Enciclopedia 1930:404. Refers to *Acacia aneura*.

**ornitorinco** (masc.sb.) (a.1819) Battisti & Alessio 1950:2679. This word, adapted from the Latin scientific name *ornithorhynchus*, is ordinarily used in Italian to denote the 'duck-billed platypus'. *Ornitorrinco*, a variant form which retains the *rr* of the original Latin is now no longer in use. The word *platipo* Enciclopedia 1930:406, an adaptation of 'platypus', is also documented.

**opossum** (masc.sb.) (1784) Cook 1784:73,81. The name applied to the Australian animals belonging to the *Phalangistinae* sub-family.

**pimelea** (fem.sb.) (a.1829) Battisti & Alessio 1950:2924. Name given to the *pimelee*, plants native to Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>11</sup> The popular names of individual types of *canguri* are also documented either in the original or in translation:

*bettongia* Battisti & Alessio 1950:502 'bettong kangaroo'

*blue-flyers* Santucci 1947:plate VI

*canguro rosso* Enciclopedia 1930:407

*canguro grigio* Bellotti 1967:178 'grey kangaroo'

*canguri-topi* Enciclopedia 1930:407 'rat kangaroos'

*euro* Bellotti 1967:178, and *kungiula* Bellotti 1967:224, both of which are given as native names for the 'rock kangaroo'.



- potoro\*** (masc.sb.) (a.1831) Battisti & Alessio 1950:3043. Name given to one of the sub-families of the *Macropodidae*. The term is an adaption of the scientific Latin *potorous* ('rat kangaroo'), from the Australian-English *potoroo*.
- principe reggente\*** (masc.sb.) (a.1831) Battisti & Alessio 1950:3083. Translation of the English *prince regent bird*, a bird native to New South Wales.
- pub:** although the word is of English origin, the context in which it is used in Gentilli 1952:85 is Australian: "...l'importanza dei centri di campagna si esprime spesso in termini di *pub*: centro con un *pub*, centro con due *pubs*, ecc." (...the importance of country towns is often expressed in terms of *pubs*; a one-pub town, a two-pub town, a three-pub town, etc.).
- riserva** (fem.sb.) (1938) De Scalzo 1938:219. An area of land where a tribe of Aborigines lives under the supervision of government officials, the movements of the tribe being usually restricted to this area. The word is a semantic calque of the term '(aboriginal) reserve', although De Salzo attributes to it a more restricted meaning than the original.
- scoiattoli volanti** (pl.masc.sb.) (1938) De Scalzo 1938:114. Translates the term *flying squirrels*, the popular name for *Sciurus volans*.
- scrub** (masc.sb.) (1930) Enciclopedia 1930:404. The word is generally used to refer to the 'mallee scrub' (*Eucalyptus oleosa*). Pl. — *scrub* or *scrubs*.
- squatters** (pl.masc.sb.) (1930) Enciclopedia 1930:424. Persons who use land which they do not own or for which they do not pay rent in order to graze sheep and cattle. The reference is to the squatters in Australia during the mid-1800's. Also documented is the word *squatting* (masc.sb.) *ibid*.
- station** (fem.sb.) (1967) Bellotti 1967:77. A sheep or cattle station. Pl. — *stations* Bellotti 1967:29.
- sundowner** (masc.sb.) (1952) Gentilli 1952:97. The tramp who arrives at a homestead at sunset in order to obtain accommodation for a night without having to work for it.
- tiger snake** (masc.sb.) (1978) Bellotti 1967:177. Term used to refer to *Hoplocephalus curtus*. This may also be translated by *serpente-tigre* De Scalzo 1938:114.
- uccello-lira** (masc.sb.) (1930) Enciclopedia 1930:408. Translation of 'lyre-bird' (*Menure novae hollandiae*).
- walkabout** (masc.sb.) (1967) Bellotti 1967:38. "Walkabout. E' un sostantivo intraducibile,... il senso è andare alla ventura, è l'azione conseguente all'impulso naturale del nomadismo." Bellotti 1967 *ibid*. (*Walkabout* is untranslatable,... it means 'to wander' and is the natural consequence of the nomadic impulse.)
- wallaby** (masc.sb.) (1967) Bellotti 1967:43. A kangaroo belonging to any of the small species of the *Macropodidae*. Pl. — *wallabies* Enciclopedia 1930:407.
- wombat\*** (masc.sb.) (1967) Bellotti 1967:58. Pl. — *wombats* Bellotti 1967:176. The adaptation *vombato* Battisti & Alessio 1950:4089, (pl. — *vombati* Enciclopedia 1930:407) is documented before the original. Both refer to the burrowing marsupials of the genus *Pascolomys*.



**womerah** (masc.sb.) (1930) *Enciclopedia* 1930:435. A stick used by the natives of Australia to lengthen the range and force of their spears. Another name for this weapon is found in *bastone da scagliare*\* Cook 1784:160 which is a translation of the English 'throwing stick'.

**yarrah**\* (masc.sb.) (1938) De Scalzo 1938:186. The tree *Eucalyptus marginata*. Also, the wood obtained from this tree.

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