

ENGLISH LOAN-WORD AND STANDARD ITALIAN ORIGINAL
IN THE VOCABULARY
OF AUSTRALIAN ITALIAN

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Attempts to describe the vocabulary of Australian Italian (AI) have so far dealt only with the description and the definition of words borrowed from Australian English (AE)¹. Such writings do little to provide a total view of AI vocabulary, since they tend to overlook the fact that a large and important sector of AI vocabulary is composed of words drawn from Standard Italian (SI) and (rarely) from major Italian dialects. Nor does the acceptance of an AE adaptation in AI automatically imply that the SI equivalent should disappear. Often the same IA and SI terms are used promiscuously :

'Talvolta gli adattamenti vengono usati accanto ai corrispondenti termini italiani con vario uso e successo. Così *bòsso*, ma talvolta si sente anche *padròne*, *principàle* o *càpo*; *bàsso* oscilla nell'uso con *àutobus* e il semidialettale *àttobus*, *ghèlla* con *ragàzza*, *amichètta* o *fidanzàta*; mentre *sòcca* viene usato meno frequentemente di *càlcio* e *pallòne*².

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relative frequency with which the most common AE adaptations are used with respect to their SI equivalents and to identify the factors which contribute to the choice of one form over the other³.

The need to eliminate lexical interference from Italian dialects among subjects who spoke dialect⁴ as well as SI led to the choice of 26 subjects (listed in Tables I and II) who demonstrated a consistent tendency to speak SI. Most of these had had some experience of formal schooling in Italian⁵, two (Table II, 4 and 6) spoke SI only because it happened to be one of the languages used in the home environment, two (Table II, 7 and 13) spoke SI only because they used this code to communicate with relations or friends who came from other regions of Italy, different from that of the region of origin of their own family.

The proficiency of each subject in SI was classified on a scale which ranged from 'excellent' to 'very poor'. The classification 'excellent' was taken to mean that subjects spoke the language without significant phonological interference from dialects or from AE, were grammatically correct and could handle colloquial vocabulary effectively. 'Good' implied the presence of consistently noticeable interference of AE or dialect. This would generally be in the area of pronunciation or syntax with some effect on vocabulary. 'Fair' denoted the presence of considerable interference. 'Poor' indicated lack of ability to

1. See, for example, Andreoni 1967, Comin 1971, Fasani 1968, Nibbi 1937, Rando 1968, Rando 1971b.
2. Rando 1971b:10.
3. The data were collected in Perth, Western Australia, during 1969 with the aid of a grant from the University of Western Australia. About 150 interviews were conducted among Italian migrant families resident in Perth.
4. Among individuals who spoke an admixture of SI and dialect it would not be unusual to encounter the use of dialect words (e.g. Sic. *carùsu* for SI *ragazzo* 'boy') or the adaptation of an AE word in dialect form (Aust. Sic. *bègu* 'bag', AI *bègo*). Individuals who spoke dialect to the complete exclusion of SI were fairly rare and in this case they would adapt AE words in dialect form only.
5. Use of SI among children of migrant families is directly correlated to formal schooling in that language. The Australian environment does not encourage long-term bilingualism and most children in migrant families tend towards monolingualism in AE.

use basic syntactic patterns, errors in morphology of SI, tendency to substitute dialect or AE items for basic SI words. 'Very poor' meant that the subject experienced considerable difficulty in communicating in SI.

For a variety of reasons, the proficiency in SI of an individual who had received primary education only in Italy before 1945, may, and in fact does, vary according to his region of origin. Those native to the central Italian provinces (excluding the Abruzzi) are more likely to achieve full proficiency in SI since the dialects of these regions are closest to SI. This is especially the case for individuals native to Tuscany whose dialects have, in the past, supplied much of the phonological and morphological basis of SI. On the other hand, those native to the extreme northern or southern regions may be expected to be less proficient in SI since these dialects differ considerably from SI.

This degree of proficiency is reflected in the AI situation by greater or lesser dialect interference in the SI of individual speakers, especially those belonging to the pre-1945 (Italian) school generation and their children, born in Australia and without formal training in SI⁶.

An individual's overall degree of proficiency in SI can affect his choice of vocabulary items in two ways. The individual who is not very proficient is liable to resort to a more or less extended usage of words drawn from his own dialect. These words, however are found to be of limited usefulness since in the AI situation they are understood only by speakers of the same dialect. In order to be understood by the others he will therefore substitute words adapted from AE when he is unsure of the correct SI word or when he cannot remember it readily.

This situation has led to the introduction of about 300 AE adaptations which are widely used in the speech of Italian migrants in Australia. Most of these borrowings are words of every-day use (*carro* 'car' – SI *automobile*, *polli frisati* 'quick-frozen chicken' – SI *polli congelati*, *sciabola* 'shovel' – SI *pala*), nearly all of which have direct counterparts in SI. The greater an individual's proficiency in SI, the greater his ability, though not necessarily his desire, to avoid these borrowings in favour of the SI equivalent.

The interviews on which the present sampling is based were conducted exclusively in SI and it can therefore be assumed that each subject was using this code to the best of his ability. Examining the vocabulary used, it was found that there were 22 items where SI and AI forms oscillated in usage to a greater or lesser extent. Sixteen SI words were used more often than their corresponding AI equivalents. Two adaptations, *craiffisci* 'crayfish' and *suðno* 'swan' were used the same number of times as the SI words. Four adaptations were used more often than their SI counterparts and of these *cangùro* and *iàrda* have no viable substitutes in SI since the former is an adaptation of 'kangaroo'⁷ while the nearest SI word for *iàrda* is *cortile* which does not exactly correspond to the Australian concept of 'yard (of a house)'. *Ciànsa* 'chance' and *rabbìscia* 'rubbish' carry shades of meaning which cannot accurately be conveyed by any of the respective SI terms.⁸

6. It was reflected to a much greater extent in American Italian during the 1920's and the 1930's where dialect rather than SI was the spoken norm and where the speech of Little Italy was regarded as 'a Babel of dialects struggling laboriously towards the standard speech' (Turano 1932:375).
7. See Rando 1970a:30-1.
8. For *ciànsa* see Rando 1968:18-9; for *rabbìscia*, Rando 1968:19.

AI adaptations tended to be used most extensively by individuals (notably d, e, 7, 13) who had had little formal training in SI, and who had lived in Australia for several years. They displayed a marked preference for expressing themselves in English or dialect rather than in SI.

Any definitive conclusions regarding the use of AI vocabulary will necessarily have to be based on a much larger sampling than that used in constructing the present model. Current research would, however, seem to indicate that the factors governing the choice of words in AI are much more complex than had been hitherto suspected. For the moment, it would not perhaps be considered out of place to posit two working hypotheses: (1) that, provided an individual has a reasonable working knowledge of SI and specifically intends to use this code, he will avoid AI words wherever possible, unless these cannot express viable SI equivalents; (2) that the use of AI vocabulary is generally due to lack of knowledge of corresponding SI expressions together with a feeling of inferiority in the use of dialect vocabulary.

TABLE I SUBJECTS WHO MIGRATED FROM ITALY

Subject	Region of origin	Period of residence in Australia (in years)	Schooling in Italian		Language(s) spoken at home	Oral Proficiency in Standard Italian
			In Italy	In Aust.		
a	Chieti	5	primary	secondary	Italian/English	good
b	Campobasso	11	primary	secondary	dialect/English	fair
c	Campobasso	7	primary	university	English/Italian	good
d	Messina	19	primary	none	dialect/Italian	fair
e	Messina	35	primary	none	Italian/dialect	good
f	Lucca	20	none	university	Italian	excellent
g	Milan	7	primary	secondary	Italian	excellent
h	Sondrio	19	none	university	Italian/dialect	good
i	Friuli	15	none	secondary	English/dialect	poor
j	Chieti	14	none	secondary	dialect/English	fair
k	Naples	16	none	university	dialect	fair
l	Messina	14	none	university	dialect	fair
m	Calabria	12	none	secondary	dialect	fair

TABLE II SUBJECTS BORN IN AUSTRALIA

Subject	Region of origin of family	Schooling in Italian	Language(s) spoken at home	Oral proficiency in standard Italian
1	Lucca	secondary	English/Italian	excellent
2	Rome	secondary	Italian/English	excellent
3	Pescara	university	dialect	good
4	Chieti	none	English/Italian	poor
5	Venice	university	Italian	good
6	Bergamo	none	Italian	fair
7	Sondrio	none	dialect	very poor
8	Brescia	secondary	English	very poor
9	Messina	secondary	English/dialect	good
10	Messina	university	English/dialect	good
11	Trapani	university	English	fair
12	Calabria	secondary	English/dialect	fair
13	Calabria	none	dialect/English	poor

TABLE III COMPARATIVE FREQUENCY OF ADAPTATIONS AND STANDARD ITALIAN EQUIVALENTS

English original	(1) AI adaptation (2) SI equivalent(s)	Used by	Number of times used	Total use
boy	(1) bòi bòia	7, 13 d, e	4	18
	(2) ragazzo	a, c, d, f, g, h, m, 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11	14	
boyfriend	(1) boifrèn ⁹	d, e, h, 4	4	26
	(2) ragazzo	d, f, h, m, 1, 8, 10	7	
	amico fidanzato	a, c, g, 3, 5, 11 f, g, h, 1, 3, 5, 9, 10, 11	6 9	
car	(1) càrro ¹⁰	d, e, m, 7, 8, 13	6	24
	(2) auto	g, i, 2, 9	4	
	automobile macchina	c, 1, 2, 3 a, b, f, h, 1, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11	4 10	

9. Subjects 7 and 13 pronounced the word in typical AE form. Subject h used the adaptation once only but used *ragazzo* several times.

10. The popularity of this adaptation is undoubtedly assisted by SI *carro* 'cart' and *autocarro* 'truck'. *Carro* 'cart' is also used in AI, but it is not very common.

chance	(1)	ciànsa ¹¹	d, e	2	
		ciànza	m, i, 4	3	
	(2)	occasione	f,	1	
		opportunità	g,	1	
		possibilità	f,	1	8
cheap	(1)	cìppe	d, e, 4	3	
	(2)	a buon mercato	a, f, 9	3	
		a poco prezzo	g, 2	2	
		scadente	f, 3	2	10
crayfish	(1)	craiffisci ¹¹	d, e	2	
	(2)	aragoste	k, l, 3	3	5
cup	(1)	càppa	d, e, 7	3	
	(2)	tazza	a, b, c, f, g, h, k, 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12	15	
		coppa ¹²	k, m, 13	3	21
emu	(1)	îmi ¹³	d	1	
	(2)	struzzo	f, 3	2	3
fight (noun)	(1)	fàit	b, d, 7	3	
	(2)	rissa	f, g, 3	3	
		pugno ¹⁴	k, m, 9	3	9
fight (verb)	(1)	faitàre ¹⁵	d, 7	2	
	(2)	azzuffarsi	f,	1	
		lottare	1, 9	2	
		prendere a cazzotti ¹⁶	2	1	6
girl	(1)	ghèlla	d, e, 6, 13	4	
	(2)	ragazza	a, c, d, f, h, 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11	12	16
girl-friend	(1)	ghelfrèn ¹⁷	d, e, 4	3	
	(2)	amichetta	a, c, g, 3, 8, 11	6	
		ragazza	f, g, h, m, 1, 5, 10	7	
		fidanzata	d, f, g, h, 1, 3, 5, 10, 11, 13	10	26

11. Subjects 9 and 10 pronounced the word in typically AE form.

12. *Coppa* in SI means 'goblet' or 'cup given to the winning team of a sports event'.

13. Subjects i, m, 4, 7, pronounced the word in typical AE form.

14. *Fait* in AI also has the meaning of 'a punch' (SI *pugno* which also means 'fist') hence the use of the two SI words: *rissa* 'a fight, a blue' *pugno* 'a punch, a fist'.

15. *Faitare* is treated as a regular first conjugation verb. The two forms actually recorded were *faitavo* (d) 'I was fighting' and *faitta* (7) 'he fights'.

16. This expression is used extensively in the spoken Italian of Rome.

17. Subjects 7 and 13 pronounced the word in typical AE form.

job	(1)	giòbba ¹⁸	b, d, e, i, j, m, 4, 6, 7, 13	10	
	(2)	lavoro	a, b, c, e, f, g, h, 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12	13	
		impiego	f, g, k, l, 1, 5	6	
		carriera	a, 1, 8	3	32
kangaroo	(1)	cangùro ¹⁹	a, d, f, k, 2, 3	6	6
money	(1)	monèta ²⁰	b, d, e, l, m, 4, 7, 8, 12	9	
	(2)	soldi	c, g, h, i, 6, 9	6	
		denaro	f, 1, 10	3	
		danaro ²¹	3, 5, 11	3	21
nice	(1)	nàisse	d, e, m, 8	4	
	(2)	bello	a, f, h, 3, 10	5	9
rabbits	(1)	rrabbìttsi	d, e,	2	
	(2)	conigli	a, b, e, f, g, h, j, l, 1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 13	14	16
rubbish	(1)	rabbìscia	b, d, e, i, l, m, 3, 4, 7, 10, 13	11	
	(2)	immondizia	a, f, g, k, 1, 2, 5, 10	8	19
school	(1)	scùle	d	1	
	(2)	scuola	a, b, e, g, h, l, m, 2, 3, 8, 9, 12	12	13
street	(1)	strìtta ²²	d, e	2	
		stritt ²²	6, 7	2	
	(2)	strada ²³	a, b, h, i, k, l, m, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9,	13	
		via	f	1	18
shovel	(1)	sciabola ²⁴	d, e, 13	3	
	(2)	pala	c, 2	2	
		paletta	5	1	
		badile	g, 1	2	8
swan	(1)	suòno ²⁵	b, d, e, i	4	
	(2)	cigno	a, g, h, 1	4	8
teacher	(1)	tìcce ²⁶		0	
	(2)	insegnante	f, k, l, 1, 2, 5	6	
		maestro (-a) professore (-essa)	a, b, d, e, i, j, m, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13 c, g, h	14 3	23

18. Prezzolini's (1939:128) remark that American Italian *giobba* does not correspond exactly to any of the SI words denoting 'work' since it is used to designate a new concept ('work ... for which there is no attachment and no spiritual interest'), can be applied, in part, to the AI situation, with the additional note that *giobba* also appears in certain AI colloquialisms translated from AE (e.g. *naisse giobba* 'nice job'). Prezzolini, however, fails to make the point that in the Italo-American situation which he describes SI words for 'work' would be relatively rare, compared to the corresponding dialect equivalents and that this factor would contribute to the universal popularity of *giobba* among Italo-Americans. Contrary to Weinreich's 1966:54 remarks there does not seem to be any semantic restriction as far as the meaning of *lavoro* in AI is concerned.
19. Seven subjects (b, h, m, 4, 6, 7, 13) pronounced the word in typical AE form.
20. *Moneta* in SI means 'a coin'. In AI, because of phonic similarity to 'money', it is used almost exclusively with this latter meaning.
21. This is a literary and antiquated variant of *denaro*, not commonly used in contemporary SI.
22. *Stritta* was used both as a noun *la stritta* and with place-names by subjects in Table I. Subjects in Table II used *la stritt* only as a noun, reverting to the AE pronunciation of *street* with place-names.
23. *Strada* and *via* are always used as nouns, but never together with place-names.
24. *Sciabola* may sometimes assume the meaning of 'spade' although this is usually adapted as *spada*. *Sciabola* and *spada* mean 'sabre' and 'sword' in SI but any semantic connection seems highly unlikely.
25. Table II subjects (4, 6, 11, 13) pronounced this word in typical AE form.
26. Although this adaptation is used in AI, it was not found to be used by subjects involved in the present sampling.

truck	(1)	tràcche	d, e, 12	3	
		trùcco	i, m	2	
	(2)	camion	a, c, g, l, 2, 3, 10, 11	8	
		autocarro vettura	f, h, 1 j, 4	3 2	18
yard (of a house)	(1)	iàrda ²⁷	a, c, d, e, j, m, 6, 13	8	
	(2)	cortile	f, h, 3, 11	4	12

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27. Subjects b, g, i, 4, 7, 8, 9, pronounced the word in typical AE form.