

# The War on Neologisms in the Italian Language

Valeria Baldocchi  
Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts & Letters of Florida Atlantic  
University

## Do neologisms enrich or deteriorate the Italian language?

### Introduction

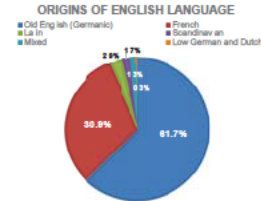
Globalization has become an agent of socioeconomic and communicative integration, and today it envelops all aspects of human life. The quasi-immediate exchange of information that surpasses the now ancient barriers of time and space has triggered a sociocultural revolution with perceptible effects on the linguistic characteristics that are at the core of collective and individual identities. Among the most noticeable cultural changes are neologisms, which are often at the center of heated linguistic debates. Some claim that the increased use of neologisms in the Italian language is a natural component of the fluctuating nature of a language and that their use enriches it. Linguistic purists take a more conservative stance and view neologisms as a linguistic enemy who blurs the distinctive differences among languages and robs them of their uniqueness. Neologisms are a mirror of contemporary Italian society and their use entails an often subconscious support of certain social currents.

### Method

Theoretical comparison of data gathered from selected relevant bibliography found through independent readings and keyword searches in MLA International Bibliography database and SearchWise, in addition to material suggested by faculty mentors.

### Language Heredity and Interconnectedness

- Every language has its roots in a fusion of different languages that in time—and after prolonged linguistic exchange—transforms into a language with systematically unique characteristics that set it apart from other languages.



- **Italian lexical borrowings:** Latin (classical and vulgar), Etruscan, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, French (medieval and Provençale), German, English, Spanish.
- Language = socialization (exchanges and dynamism).
- **Neologisms:** newborn words that, if nurtured through use, will acquire linguistic maturity and will become part of the standard language.
- In time, neologisms turned standard will become obsolete and will be replaced by new terms that better reflect the ever-changing society that gives them life through use.

### Neologisms as a Mirror of Social Phenomena

- **Globalization and political liberation**
  - Rampant use of foreign-derived neologisms today.
- **Mussolini's language policy during the Fascist regime**
  - Publication of "*Una parola al giorno*", in *La Gazzetta del Popolo* (1932)
    - E.g. The neologism "*piccolo cavallo da sella*" as an alternative to *bidet*.
- **Racial conflicts related to immigrants in contemporary Italian society**
  - "*vu cumprà*"

*vu' cumprà* [vu kumprà ▶ o vu kkumprà ▶] (meno com. *vucumprà* [vukumprà ▶] o *vuccumprà* [vukkumprà ▶]; raro *vocumprà* [vokumprà ▶]) s. m. — appellativo scherz. o spreg. di venditori ambulanti africani (da una pn. approssimativa loro attribuita per vuoi comprare?)



- Terms recently included in *Devoto-Oli* Italian dictionary:
  - Ecology and science:** *fracking*, *rinaturazione*
  - Technology:** *geotag*
  - Politics:** *agenda digitale*
  - Economy and finance:** *spending review*
  - Urban fads:** *sigaretta elettronica*
  - Youth jargon:** *svalvolare*

### Linguistic "Colonialism" of Italian by English

- In a hyper-globalized and heavily Americanized world, some scholars interpret the elevated use of English neologisms as a limitless linguistic "colonization" by American English.
- Political movements such as *Radicali Italiani* argue that the unrestrained use of English is a linguistic genocide that risks obliterating linguistic diversity and uniqueness in the world.
- *Selfie*: Linguistic fads no longer pertain only to the use of words in communication but also to the "wearing" of terms and therefore to a capitalistic/materialistic ownership and appropriation of them.



### Linguistic Effectiveness and Superfluosity of Neologisms

- **Technological expressions:** "*googlare*" vs. "*fare una ricerca su Google*"; "*skypare*" vs. "*fare una telefonata via Skype*"
- **Words that replace entire phrases:** "*jet-lag*" vs. "*il malore che producono i lunghi viaggi aerei a causa del cambiamento di fusi orari*"
- **Effective and logical translations:** "*tastiera*" for "*keyboard*", "*schermo*" vs. "*screen*" (Using the foreign term may make one appear lazy, conformist, or arrogant)
- **No existing equivalent translation or term:** "*marketing*"

### Discussion

Neologisms cement themselves into language through their progressive internalization and use, not through forced imposition (E.g. Fascist foreign substitutions). Neologisms were heavily employed by Dante himself, an undisputed contributor to the richness of the Italian language. The human gift of language offers not only the capacity of communicating any concept, but also the possibility of choosing *how* to communicate it. One should aim to be mindful of the historical and current social phenomena that bring about the use of certain terms in order to make an informed decision when subscribing to the sociocultural currents that the use of a particular word often entails.

### Further Studies

The effect of fascist neologisms and language policy on contemporary Italian language.

### References

- "Language Contact." *Language Files: Materials for an Introduction to Language and Linguistics*. Ed. Vedrana Mihalicek and Christin Wilson. 11th ed. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2011. 486, 491. Print.
- Ghinassi, Ghino. "Neologismi." *Enciclopedia Dantesca*. Treccani, 1970. Web. 20 Nov. 2014.
- Manni, Paola. *Il Trecento toscano: la lingua di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003. Print.
- Pagano, Giorgio. "Global English: "progresso" o colonizzazione linguistica?" *Radicali Italiani*. Il Futurista, 7 July 2011. Web. 2 Dec. 2014.
- Romano, Sergio. "Le parole straniere e l'italiano: un <<barbaro dominio>>." *Corriere Della Sera*. 18 Jan. 2006: 37. Print.
- Severgnini, Beppe. "Ho deciso: skyperò." *Beppe Severgnini Website*. Corriere Della Sera. N.d. Web. 24 Nov. 2014.