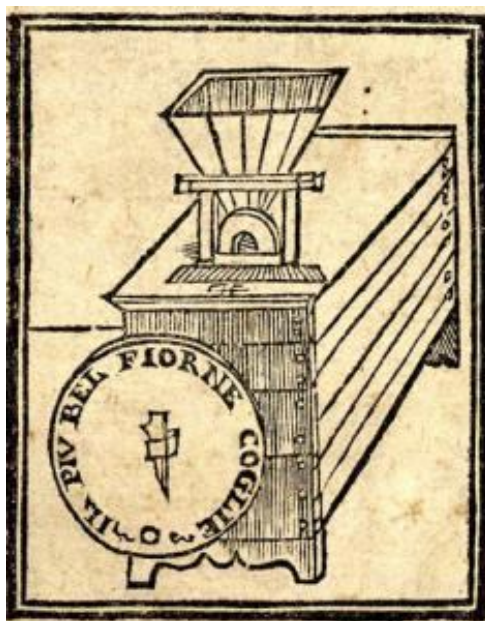


Speaking Italian Is *Very Bello!*

Very Bello was the slogan adopted by last year's World Expo in Milan, and this is just one of the many examples that show how, if ever it be necessary, Anglo-American English has become the language of a globalization which is pouring loads of English words into Italian.

In 2015, the *Accademia della Crusca*, literally 'Bran Academy', which was founded in Florence in ca. 1583, started to ring alarm bells about the increase of English words in the Italian language, particularly in the fields of information technology, economics, finance and politics. Originally, the word *crusca* (bran), and other symbols related to the process of bread-making, were chosen to give the Accademia the aim of "separating the flour (the good language) from the bran (the bad language)", following a language model that was based on the supremacy of the Florentine vulgar tongue and modelled on the authors of the 14th century. The sifter, used to separate the flour from the husk, became the symbol of the Accademia, and in 1612 they published the first edition of their dictionary: the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, which was successful all around Europe and served as the model for similar works in other European languages. Until the beginning of the 20th century, the Accademia's main purpose was to maintain the integrity of the Italian language. Today, its mission is the study and promotion of the Italian language, but it has no legal power over the proper use of Italian; it can simply offer advice.

In February 2015, after hosting a summit on Anglicisms in Italian, the Accademia della Crusca started a committee of linguists called *Incipit* whose aim is to prevent the adoption of foreign words by suggesting Italian equivalents. Among Incipit's first targets was *hot spot*, used in Italy to refer to a processing centre for the refugees streaming into the European Union. According to Incipit, *hot spot* makes Italians think of a 'Wi-Fi connection point' or a 'trendy place.' Also, we Italians tend to associate the word 'hot' with food or with sexual contexts. The expression, therefore, fails to capture the seriousness of the matter and all its implications; it is 'offensive, elusive, and politically incorrect'. It would be easier and plainer to use the already existing Italian



expression *centri di identificazione* (identification centers).

According to Claudio Marazzini, member of Incipit and president of the *Accademia della Crusca*, the great amount of English words borrowed from economics and politics shows an attempt to conceal crude reality. This would explain, for example, the widespread adoption of the word *default* that, to an Italian, sounds less worrying than *fallimento* and/or *bancarotta*. Synthesis, though, is one good reason for adopting English words. The much criticized *Ministero del Welfare* is certainly more concise than *Ministero del lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali*, but it is also less clear to Italians.

However, why are we Italians so willing to borrow from foreign languages? In his *La lingua italiana e le lingue romanze di fronte agli anglicismi* (Accademia della Crusca, Firenze, 2015) Marazzini explains that for centuries Italy was a patchwork of city-states, each with its own system of government and its own dialect. Unification came as late as 1861. Starting from the early 14th century, with Dante Alighieri's treatise *De vulgari eloquentia* (On Eloquence in the vernacular), and in the course of subsequent centuries, the Italian cultural tradition was never too kind towards linguistic contamination. This was mainly because the language was seen as the only symbol of unity in a country that lacked political organisation. Then fascism arrived!

The *Reale Accademia d'Italia* (Royal Academy of Italy) was an organization of

Italian intellectuals created by the Fascist government in 1926, and dissolved in 1943. The aim was 'to promote and coordinate Italian intellectual activity in the sciences, the humanities and the arts, to preserve the integrity of the national spirit according to the genius and tradition of the race'. Mussolini's government implemented a series of language laws in an attempt to build national unity. In South Tyrol German-language schooling was suspended. Foreign names and place-names were Italianized, dialects and foreign words were outlawed, and linguistic minorities were discriminated against. New Italian words were created by the Accademia for foreign words that were already commonly used: *pellicola* for film, *brioscia* for brioche, *arlecchino* for cocktail, *urto di nervi* for shock, *ferribotto* for ferry boat, *sciampagna* for champagne, *fin di pasto* for dessert and so on, all together about 500 words. Sometimes the spelling was altered, such as *blu* for bleu or *valzer* for waltzer. Some of the words created by the Accademia have survived, making the foreign ones disappear (i.e. *atterraggio* instead of *atterissage*); in some other cases, both words have survived (i.e. *budget/bilancio*). Nowadays, though, Italians still say 'cocktail' and German is still spoken in South Tyrol, but language purity laws, a reminder of the fascist era, have become taboo. In France, which has a different history, this does not happen. The country is in fact notoriously protective of its native tongue (one might argue even excessively). To give an example: the country requires that a minimum of 40 percent of the songs played on radio stations be French and in the French language.

On the whole, linguistic borrowings are inevitable and often necessary, but they should not be deliberately misleading. What's more, using foreign words sometimes makes us feel that we have acquired a certain amount of international integration. Perhaps instead we should try and develop a better knowledge of foreign languages.

– by Chiara Calabrese

A final note: A few days ago an elementary school boy, Matteo, used the adjective *petaloso* to describe a flower with lots of petals. The schoolteacher marked it as "a beautiful mistake". The Accademia della Crusca have officially accepted the adjective as a neologism because it is "beautiful and clear".

[Click here to read an article from last month: >>](#)

[<< home](#)