

# THE ITALIANS AND THEIR LANGUAGE IN AUSTRALIA

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'Australia's largest non-British and yet probably least understood – or most misunderstood – minority'. W.D. Borrie, p. vi of the Foreword to J.A. Hempel's *Italians in Queensland* (1959).

It is appropriate to embark upon a survey of this kind at a time when migration to Australia from overseas has lost momentum and the economic recession of 1971, together with changing public attitudes, make it likely that there will be a considerable diminution in immigration from Europe, and that this external source of population increase for Australia may be relatively ignored for many years. It has also been the case, from the late 1960s, that with the improvement of the West-European economy and the creation of the Common Market, the source was already running out and that the Italian influence had almost certainly reached its all-time peak.

Referring particularly to the post World War II influx Professor Borrie more than a decade ago asked the following questions,

Where have these people settled, what occupations have they followed, how have they brought their families together, . . . . . have Italians integrated to any degree with Australians, do Australians want or expect them to do so –? (*op. cit.*, p. vi)

While these questions are demographic and social and the answers belong strictly to spheres other than language, it is the case that the surviving pointers may ultimately be held to be linguistic and to have been fossilized both in speech and literature.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Revolutions of the Risorgimento and the Wars of Independence had unsettled Italy politically and economically, and had forced many of her citizens to seek a haven overseas. They went to the Argentine, America, and Western Europe and they came to Australia.

Further, late in the nineteenth century and early in this one economic conditions both in Apulia and Sicily were in a chaotic state. Poverty was widespread, and the political events of the period had not improved the lot of the ordinary working man, so that it was hard to retain a sense of pride in and identity with the motherland and the colonial experience was often a decisive one.

Although individual Italians have settled in Australia in all periods and some have attained positions of importance, there was no very considerable influx of Italian settlers until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Subsequently there was a fairly steady flow, both to and from Italy, with large numbers of arrivals during the immigration schemes following both World Wars.

The majority of these incoming Italians have settled in the eastern states, in Queensland almost entirely as labourers or farmers in the sugar-producing areas, and in New South Wales and Victoria preponderantly as town and metropolitan dwellers, particularly as traders, food providers<sup>1</sup> and market gardeners. 'Italians in Sydney congregate where there are Italian grocers, Italian restaurants, Italian boarding houses' (*Sydney Morning Herald* June 30, 1961, p. 2)

There has also been considerable Italian settlement in Western Australia, where many have been and still are employed in the mining and timber-cutting industries and, to a lesser extent, in South Australia. Small groups of Italian fishermen have been established here and there notably in Western Australia and pockets of Italians have worked in the wine industries of New South Wales and South Australia, both as growers and as retailers.

The general migration of Italians to Australia has followed lines somewhat different from those of other nationalities. The tendency has been for groups from one particular place or area in Italy to follow one another to Australia and to settle in a district suitable for carrying on their particular calling. Commonly the men have emigrated first and established themselves before sending

<sup>1</sup>Craig Macgregor in his survey of popular Australian culture comments that 'most vegetable shops seem to be run by Italians', *Profile of Australia* (1966), p.148. One Signor Bragato, initially a gold-miner, was appointed in 1888 as the first viticultural expert to the Government of Victoria.

for their fiancées or families.<sup>2</sup> The following paragraph records something of the flavour of one typical early clustering.

'By about 1881, a number of Italians (mostly Sicilians) had settled at Point (Cape) Peron about 19 miles south of Fremantle (W.A.) and formed a fishing concern by pooling their capital and selling the catch in one block. Fishing in that area had begun as early as 1830, when the first settlers had practised the industry, but this group now sold its fish by a very primitive haggling arrangement<sup>3</sup> on the beach at Fremantle. They then settled themselves at the larger port where they constituted more than 50 per cent of the licensed fishing community and were divided into two communities, Sicilians and Apulians,<sup>4</sup> between which there was a slight animosity, with, there is said, a sense of superiority in the Sicilians towards the Apulians.'

Climatic factors have influenced the general racial structure of the Australian population. Apart from the concentration of aborigines in the north, and the understandable presence of Pacific Islanders in the far north, it is for example of interest to note in electoral rolls, telephone books and other lists of personal names for northern Queensland the much greater proportion of those of south European origin as opposed to British or northern European names than occur even in the southern part of that same state.

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At the beginning of this century, between 1901 and 1913, Italian immigration to Australia amounted to 12,000 persons, or 0.3 per cent of Italian overseas emigration. Between 1919 and 1925 Australian participation in overseas emigration rose to almost 1.5 per cent and between 1925 and 1939 to almost 5 per cent. Between 1946 and 1957 the Australian share of the exodus was 12.5 per cent, and from 1957 to 1963, almost 17 per cent. Before World War I the average annual Italian overseas emigration was 363,500 per-

<sup>2</sup>This period of waiting often lasted more than ten years, although that has not been the case since 1946.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Gamba, *A Report on The Italian Fisherman of Fremantle, A Preliminary Study in Sociology and Economics* (1952), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>*Op. cit.* p. 5.

sons, between the wars – mainly due to the internal and colonial Italian population policy – it dropped to 92,000 persons, and in the eleven post-war years rose to 113,000 persons per annum. Between 1946 and 1957, 1,356,000 Italians emigrated overseas, and between 1901 and 1939, there were 6,948,107 emigrants.

Some idea of this Italian influence on Australia in more recent years may be gained from the following census figures.

Table 1

YEAR OF CENSUS	ITALIAN-BORN IN <sup>5</sup> AUSTRALIA	INCREASE OVER PREVIOUS CENSUS
1871	960	
1881	1,359	399
1891	3,890	2,531
1901	5,678	1,788
1911	6,719	1,041
1921	8,135	1,416
1933	26,693	18,558
1947	33,623	6,930
1954	119,643	86,020
1961	228,296	108,653
1966	267,325 <sup>6</sup>	39,029

During the peak immigration years (1949-52) the Italians, with a total net immigration of 65,990 constituted the largest group of new Australian settlers from any single nation, apart from the British.

Thus the Italians may now be said to have invaded Australia, at least as much as the Welsh have England, by elbowing aside

<sup>5</sup> These figures do not, of course, include those of Italian extraction born in Australia.

<sup>6</sup> In the period 1961-1966, there was an actual drop from 154,009 to 153,413 in the number of Italian nationals in Australia (see *Official Yearbook of the Commonwealth of Australia*, No. 55, (1969), p. 136), but this is adequately explained by naturalization after five years of domicile in the new country. For Italians have one of the lowest percentages for any migrants of permanent return to homeland.

other groups. Yet the very recentness of this major influx is indicated in the distinctiveness of domestic customs, of habits of mind, and of their very names.

Some conception of the possible proportions of Italians in a similar stock is indicated by the U.S.A., where the 1930 census figure for Italians born was 1,790,424, it being backed by 2,306,015 persons of Italian stock born there, and 450,438 born there of part Italian parentage. Thus the original figure becomes 4,546,877 in all, of whom 1,808,289 reported that Italian was their mother tongue.

While Italians, outside Europe, like the Germans, have settled in immigrant pockets for periods of a generation or more, the relations between the immigrant minorities<sup>7</sup> and the Australians have not been of the type that would facilitate linguistic exchange. The settlements were isolated and often rural in the nineteenth century, while in the (mid) twentieth they have tended to be ghettos in the decaying inner suburbs, particularly of Sydney and of Melbourne.

In Australia, alien communities have either dissipated rapidly, as did the Scandinavian,<sup>8</sup> or retained their own cultural and linguistic identity, as did the Italian (for the first generation at least), the German and the Chinese. This was certainly true of New Italy, the Italian settlement near Woodburn in the Richmond River district of northern New South Wales. The Italians who came from Treviso in the province of Venetia had been introduced by an agent of the Marquis de Rays to join his ill-fated scheme for forming a colony in New Ireland in the Bismark Archipelago to the north-east of the mainland of New Guinea, and they had sailed from Barcelona in July 1880. After the collapse of the settlement at Port Breton in New Ireland, the group<sup>9</sup> was conveyed to Sydney,

<sup>7</sup> A survey of the Italian immigration between the wars is to be found in W.D. Borrie's *Italians and Germans in Australia*, (1954), F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne.

<sup>8</sup> 'Scandinavian immigration to Australia reached a peak in 1891, when there were 16,500 Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes in Australia, most of them in Queensland', W.S. Ramson, *Australian English: An Historical Study of the Vocabulary, 1788-1898* (1966), p. 158. Their place names are listed in this book.

<sup>9</sup> In 1881, the group was estimated at about 200 souls. (see *Australian Encyclopedia* (1958 edition), Vol. 5, p. 113).

via Noumea. After various dispersals in Australia, the group reformed on the Richmond and remained intact for about ten years, but gradually the second generation of Italians found employment elsewhere, and by the 1930s only a few families remained there. The clusters of the colonists' descendants have remained in places like Pomona (in Queensland) and Dorrigo and Kyogle (in New South Wales), and intermarriage amongst these clans is still common and approved of in the third generation.

A further factor which greatly assisted the second generation assimilation was that, unlike certain other national groups (notably the Germans), poorer Italians have been fortunate in finding a religious organization, the Roman Catholic Church, established and ready to welcome them in Australia. And for at least a century a number of the high officials of the Vatican who have resided temporarily in Australia have been Italians.<sup>10</sup> Vicars-general and papal nuncios were often Italian, as was the suffragan Bishop of Armidale, Torregiani, at the end of the nineteenth century.

Overall the Italian influence in Australia, at least in the earlier periods, has been similar in pattern to that of the United States of America where in 1914, for example, the largest number of migrants had come from Italy. It had been generally felt there that immigrants from Southern Europe were harder to assimilate than those from the West, so that the number of Italians admitted under the act reduced drastically from 1921 to 1924.

The influx of Southern Europeans generally received a setback between 1921 and 1925 when, owing to the fact that they arrived in greater numbers than could readily be absorbed, the Government found itself constrained to rule that a foreign immigrant should be in possession of £40 on landing in Australia. Yet the total group in the census of 1933 showed an increase of these people of about 28,000. The Italians accounted for c. 18,600, the Greeks for 4,600 the Yugoslavs for 3,100, and the Maltese<sup>11</sup> for 1,500.

<sup>10</sup> Although the reasons for his case are much more complex than the Italian element, it is the argument of John N. Molony, in his *The Roman Mould of the Australian Catholic Church* (1969) that Rome and not Ireland established and maintains the spirit of the Catholic Church in Australia.

<sup>11</sup> See appendix for a note on Maltese migrant numbers.

While the census of 1921 shows that, in that year, the far greater proportion of Italians lived in towns, in Queensland 85 per cent lived on the land,<sup>12</sup> showing a preference for the northern districts and the sugar industry.

Racially, Italians fall into two main groups, viz., the Mediterraneans in Southern Italy and Sicily (with considerable influxes for Australia from the regions of Calabria and Apulia) and the Alpines in Northern Italy (with large numbers of Piedmontesi and Lombardians from Veneto-Friuli, Trieste, Fiume, Liguria and Emilia). It is and has been generally true that there is more Australian immigration interest in the northern districts which are well cultivated and whose economic progress is good, whereas the southern districts are backward and the living standard of the people low.

If we ignore Queensland for the moment, it may be said that most of the early Italians to reach Australia probably hailed from the city population of Italy, and may be assumed to have been of the Mediterranean stock. While the post 1946 migrant has largely been a city dweller in Australia, those arriving in earlier periods were mainly involved in heavy seasonal work in the sugar cane industry of Queensland, in road construction, in timber squaring, in maize picking and potato digging, apart from the still earlier gold mining and the well-nigh universal toil to grow grapes, however unsuitable the environment.<sup>13</sup>

The Italians of such early communities as the Fremantle one or early New Italy represent the differing generation pattern found also amongst later settlers, although there are many profound differences. The first type was unsophisticated, religious, content to live at an almost subsistence level, with sacred pictures in the

<sup>12</sup>This situation continued, as is indicated by the following special interim report (of limited circulation), viz: J.A. Hempel, *Italians in Queensland: Some aspects of post-war settlement of Italian migrants*, with a foreword by W.D. Borrie. Canberra, Australian National University, 1959. Similarly, H.L. Mencken *The American Language*, (edition cited) p. 214 shows that the concentration of more than 80% of the Italians occurred in relatively few cities in the United States of America also.

<sup>13</sup>New Italy was an example of a group of settlers concerned to produce vineyards at various places where there were not the requisite conditions.

house, older furniture, the horseshoe and glove to avert the *mal occhio*, or bad luck, few toys and in extreme cleanliness and simplicity. The family group was/is composed of father, mother and three to six children. Where Southern Italians were/are involved, the father, who came to Australia as a young man, can hardly read or write in Italian, preferring to talk in his own dialect as his English is very poor and his Austral-Italian, not much better.<sup>14</sup> He is skilled at his craft, and not really interested in Australian affairs, although his modern counterpart may read an Italian newspaper printed in Australia.<sup>15</sup>

The second generation, the sons and daughters of the first, would seem to have smaller families than their parents – or else to tend to acquire the type of family nucleus prevalent in the adopted country. To marry an outsider – someone not belonging to the community was/is not unusual, as long as he was/is an Italian.<sup>16</sup> This group is often in the interpreter role for parents, in dealing with taxation or school authorities, one necessitated by the fact that it was not until c. 1950 that the Federal programme of prosecuting the teaching of English reached any real intensity. As Gamba observed of the second generation Fremantle Italians –

Even when born here they were never up to the standard of their Australian fellows because the only language spoken at home was either dialect or Italian (*op. cit.* p. 58).

The Australian-born Italians live in a better class of home and have more comforts than their parents, having acquired many of the Australian ways of living, without, however, entirely abandoning their own culture. Thus conflict can be brought about by these individuals trying to repudiate their own cultural ties, yet finding that they are not accepted by the Australians whose companionship

<sup>14</sup> For a later study see G. Rando, 'The influence of Australian English on Italian spoken by Sicilian migrants in Perth', *Quaderni Dell'Instituto italiano di Cultura* 4 (1971), pp. 171-76.

<sup>15</sup> Various periodicals have been published for the settlers in Italian, those between the wars including *Italiano* and *Italo Australia*. While these died soon after 1939, their place was taken by the prestigious *Italian News Weekly (La Fiamma)*

<sup>16</sup> Similar extra-clan marriage is to be found between those of Greek extraction or of Greek-Cypriot family.



they would like to obtain as they become 'ungrouped'.

After 1945, optimism about the economic future of the country, coupled with a general feeling that the war had shown the danger of Asian attack, to which an underpopulated continent was exposed, stimulated a determined national effort to develop a large Australian immigration programme. In addition to the assisted passages for British migrants, and the bringing of some 170,000 refugees from the displaced persons camps of central and eastern Europe during the years 1947-1952, Australia in 1952-53 negotiated agreements with Italy, the Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, involving joint assistance towards the cost of passages by the governments concerned and the selection of migrants according to employment opportunities in Australia.

Some idea of the pattern of Italian background of more recent migrants is given by J.A. Hempel in his survey<sup>17</sup> of those leaving Italy by ship between 1952 and 1956.

Over this same period, there was a marked preference for Australia among migrants from Veneto, Abruzzi and Molise, and particularly from Calabria and Sicily. Far more from Veneto chose Australia than any other country, the largest number from Calabria did likewise, while Venezuela and Australia were the next choice for Sicilians after the United States of America.

Over this period there was a relative drop in emigration from Veneto and Friuli, while in southern Italy the three main regions of Abruzzi and Molise, Campania and Calabria show a steady and considerable increase as migrant-sending areas. As the contribution of Sicily might seem to be stationary, it is quite evident that southern Italy is not only the main source of Italian overseas emigration, but that it has been also increasing its share in that movement, a trend more marked as Northern Italy<sup>18</sup> has contributed

<sup>17</sup>This material is extrapolated from the tables in his *Italians in Queensland* (1959), p. 2, the ultimate source being the statistical Yearbooks for Italy. See also appendix tables to James Jupp, *Arrivals and Departures*, Melbourne, Cheshire - Lansdowne, 1966.

<sup>18</sup>It is of interest to note that Australia received almost 80 per cent of the emigrants from the city of Trieste, although this group could be classed as refugees.

Table 2

	CANADA	UNITED STATES	VENEZUALA	AUSTRALIA	TOTAL OVERSEAS
Piedmont	511	1533	1335	1265	9922
Lombardy	546	1649	1360	2490	12869
Trento	756	424	163	566	3827
Veneto	8759	1623	3790	11344	35579
Friuli	9220	1390	3508	6057	23830
Trieste	150	853	294	7301	9227
Liguria	454	2429	1096	616	8588
Emilia	805	1971	3601	1369	12841
Tuscany	1140	3735	1028	2793	13490
Umbria	275	276	305	230	2265
The Marches	2830	968	1323	1974	10784
Latium	11065	10483	7992	3209	43512
Abruzzi and Molise	23824	13989	23017	14038	98206
Campania	7472	18664	28414	8180	96000
Apulia	6270	7209	13525	3507	37507
Basilicata	1425	1427	3413	1628	17784
Calabria	22217	12273	3310	23284	110372
Sicily	8778	23826	18738	18559	88236
Sardinia	150	166	171	606	1902
Not Indicated	384	401	466	260	2725
TOTAL	107033	105389	116849	109276	645194
Departures to Italy	4280	16940	43600	8875	136548
Percentage of departures: arrivals	4.00	16.07	37.31	8.12	21.16

more to the Italian immigration to other countries in Europe. The figures for Italian departures from Australia indicate a very considerable degree of contentment of the migrants, and this is particularly so amongst farmers and rural workers. A considerable proportion of the returnees come from the group of single men amongst the white collar workers.

It is difficult to say whether the Northern Italian migrant is 'better' or 'worse' than the southern one. Yet there are considerable differences between them which are due not only to ethnic, social and economic reasons but also to the historical fact that the division of Italy into a number of kingdoms and principalities lasted until 1870. It is still felt that the Italian, and particularly the Southern Italian and the Sicilian, shows more local patriotism to his town or province than to his country, Italy, as a whole, and this fact has considerable impact on the economic and social behaviour of the Italian in the country of his adoption. As is pointed out by Hempel (*op. cit.*, p. 39) 'it is estimated, that the Italian is the youngest immigrant to Australia', and this fact, coupled with the relative freedom from sense of nationality has, like his Catholic religion, assisted the Italian migrant in Australia.

While Queensland has not retained its high proportion of all Italian migrants in the post-war years, the recruitment to Queensland cane-fields has frequently been the first placement of the young Italian male immigrant, 'sweating it out' there to begin a career and then with his savings to establish a home and family in the softer climate and easier conditions of the southern states.<sup>19</sup> Still others there have turned to such other agricultural employment as tobacco and fruit growing.

Whether they are northern or southern, the tendency for cells and larger groups to persist is to be found in various spheres where occupational isolation is a factor. Thus in the 1950s the Italian fishermen of Fremantle were still distinctively patterned.

'The Italian fishermen of this community..... are clearly divided into two large groups: those from Sicily and those from

<sup>19</sup>In similar fashion many Greeks and Cypriots began their Australian careers in the Snowy Mountain hydro-electric labour camps, both in life and in literature, and then withdrew to the cities.

Apulia. The Sicilians are almost all natives of Capo d'Orlando (province of Messina)..... While the Apulians are natives of Molfetta – a fishing town in the province of Bari – placed on the eastern coast of the Italian boot below the spur.....

The family inter-relationship between the various groups is not pronounced..... the tendency is, however, for the individuals to gravitate – in all their intercourses – towards their own native group.'<sup>20</sup>

This occupative cluster then had a distinctive pattern for education, the larger proportion of Italian children attending the Christian Brothers' College and the Convent school.<sup>21</sup> Their doctor was an Italian, a native of Sicily and thus a speaker of the dialect of the island and so these spheres and others were free from the normal mixing which is a part of migrant assimilation. A concern with education was a feature of many pockets of early settlers and considerable efforts were made to learn English.

Yet the ideas of the older generation seldom changed with the change of physical scene. Travel seldom broadened the mind. If the first generation father is asked for an opinion on Italian affairs he shrugs, commenting on blood relatives in Italy that 'Il popolo fa sempre la fame' – 'The people (i.e. poor people) is always hungry', his general attitude and expectation being related to a demand for fair earnings and a quiet life.<sup>22</sup> Gamba however reported that private life, if lived in a narrow social environment, would be honestly lived, and in contrast with the public concept of the 'dago' as carrying a knife (*op. cit.*, pp. 50-51).

Of course, the withdrawal of Italians is not just because of

<sup>20</sup> C. Gamba, *op. cit.* p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> *op. cit.* p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> A somewhat more sophisticated view from later migrants is that of J. Jupp's 'Migrant Opinion Survey 1965-1966' (*op. cit.* p. 186) where in Question 19, 58 per cent of Italian migrants would have encouraged fellow-countrymen to emigrate to Australia, while in Question 20, if given a completely free choice as to where they would prefer to live, the same Italian sampling had 79 per cent voting in favour of the homeland. See also *Cambridge History of the British Empire* Vol. VII, (1933), pp. 501-2, and Table C. p. 96 of W.D. Borrie, *Immigration: Australia's Problems and Prospects*, (1949).

work or language problems, but as a reaction to certain aspects of the Australian way of life, particularly the lack of interest in relatives and the aged, in short the looseness of the family unit. The newcomers continue today to live in close-knit family groups, shielding and sharing. The family circle stretches out to include aunts and uncles, cousins, godfathers and godmothers. Italian shipping lines and loan companies regularly lend money on easy terms for the purpose of bringing more relatives out from Italy and thus there is both reinforcement of the existing clan and semi-official recognition of it as a way of life.

This withdrawal takes the form of a ghetto in the larger case, and this has been a feature of the 1950's particularly in the capital cities of the various Australian states. In his *Arrivals and Departures* (1966) James Jupp shows that there were discernible from the 1961 Census a number of municipal and other areas with high migrant populations, as the following percentages of Italian born would indicate:

Table 3\*

STATE	AREA	NAME	PERCENTAGE
Victoria	Melbourne	Fitzroy	42.91
Victoria	Melbourne	Melbourne	31.46
Victoria	Melbourne	Brunswick	31.71
Victoria	Country	Myrtleford	25.64
South Australia	Adelaide	Thebarton	31.29
"	"	St. Peters	29.21
"	"	Campbelltown	28.65
"	"	Kensington	29.40
Western Australia	Perth	Fremantle	27.21
"	Country	Tableland	47.50
New South Wales	Country	Queanbeyan	30.63
Queensland	Country	Minchinbrook	28.29
*(Items taken from Jupp's table on p. 181)			

Of all migrants to Australia the Italians have been the youngest upon arrival. The following figures as percentages are given by Jupp<sup>23</sup> as representative of the migrant opinion survey he conducted in 1965-66.

Table 4

MAJOR NATIONALITIES	AGES					
	UNDER 21	21-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	OVER 60
British	6	6	43	39	—	6
Dutch	—	3	46	24	24	3
Greek	5	40	34	16	5	—
Italian	12	56	24	3	5	—

\* \* \*

Religion may be held to fill a qualified place in the life of labourers like the Fremantle fisherman, and there were cases there some forty years ago, of the Catholic Church feeling the need for a religious revival. Yet that group of Apulians considered the 8th of September as a holiday, the Feast Day of the Madonna dei Martiri, the patron saint of Molfetta and a day for ceasing work and attending Mass. Perhaps the modern pattern for worship amongst Italians and Australians was set in the 1950s and 1960s when the rising numbers, at least in the eastern cities, made it possible for the Italians to avoid ordinary Roman Catholic churches and to concentrate on the parishes with (American-) Italian clergy.

'Most Italians want a church unaesthetically crammed with trinkets and statues. They want a paternal priest who will give

<sup>23</sup>In *Arrivals and Departures*, (1966), p. 182.

<sup>24</sup>This compares closely with North America, as is indicated by C.F. Westoff and others, in *Family Growth in Metropolitan America* (1961), which reports (pp. 202-211) that in one analysis of Catholic women it was found that, in the better groups, 92 per cent of the Irish regular Roman Catholic church goers had been to schools of their denomination whereas the same was true of only 43 per cent of Italian women.



them plenty of attention and tell them kindly but firmly exactly what they should do. They want stirring sermons, liberally laced with hell fire, and the recurring consolation of confession.... It is essential for most newcomers to live in or near the parish of an Italian church.' (Quoted in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 30, 1961 p. 2).

As is common amongst the earlier *Southern Italians* – (and similar observations have been made of Sydney migrants some fifteen years later) – church-schooling is a matter of relative indifference to parents, because of a reluctance to pay the Roman Catholic School's fees.<sup>24</sup> Another obvious feature of such families is the considerable sums spent on weddings, funerals and christenings, as well as the dress of the daughters, something contrasting markedly with the modesty of dress of married women, particularly the older ones. Yet this pattern is made more complex when, because of the shortage of Italian women, the migrants marry Irish Catholic Australian women whose social allegiances and life styles are more publicly conformist and less flamboyant.

By their very nature, (Australian) Italians are very sociable people who do not like solitude. Unlike many other migrant groups, e.g. the Greeks, Yugoslavs, or the Baltic groups, they do not form national associations, because they are nationally apolitical and have no premeditated tendency to preserve their language and traditions as is the case with practically all the other national groups. Their desire to get together is of a purely social and personal character and a substitute for the highly developed *piazza* social life in Italian towns and villages. Although its possible presence is taken as something of a hoax by the general populace, there is evidence to suggest that the *mafia*<sup>25</sup> does exist, particularly in Sydney. But the English argot of roguery,<sup>26</sup> one always rich in Australia, seems to have borrowed little from Italian sources, and that distinctive Italian or Sicilian institution is not a visible part of the migrants' life style.

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<sup>25</sup> For the possible influence of the Mafia, see W.D. Borrie, *Italians and Germans in Australia*, A study of Assimilation (1954), pp. 115, 145, 230.

<sup>26</sup> See *The Memoirs of James Hardy Vaux*, including his Vocabulary of the Flash Language, edited by Noel McLachlan (1964).

Such is, in brief, the general pattern of Italian population and occupation in Australia over the last century or so. The linguistic situation must now be described, even though any attempt to do this is fraught with many problems.<sup>27</sup> Lexis is the most obvious starting point, and from it consideration will then be given to semantics and syntax.

Any meaningful study of Australian Italian vocabulary and construction is almost impossible at this point in time, because it would need to be based on a wide range of taped records and such sources as the detailed analyses of the letters and sporting articles in the metropolitan Italian language newspapers. Steps in this direction are the two articles in *Lingua Nostra* by Gaetano Rando:

- (1) 'Alcuni Anglicismi nel dialetto di Filioudi Percorini', *op. cit.*, March 1967;  
 and  
 (2) 'Influenze dell'inglese sull'italiano di Sydney', *ibid.*, June 1967.

Other sources available to the dialectologist are the advertisements and commercial correspondence in Real Estate Agencies, corner shop notices about bargains, closing, etc., as well as the colloquial street chatter of the Italian quarters of Sydney and Melbourne.

In the sphere of Australian English and its vocabulary and ideas, the general borrowing pattern is, understandably much nearer the American than that to be found in England, a country with a very small Italian population, entrenched dietary habits, and a much colder climate than the Mediterranean equivalent style of the continent of Australia.

While the ghetto or settlement group has always persisted with the Italians, Slavs, and Jews, and since 1945, amongst the Greeks, the Italians in Australia, if poor in earlier decades, have become prosperous in the last fifteen years and so have come out from the ghetto to impose a distinctive style in the metropolitan areas. In that zone of confrontation linguistic commerce has been at its most busy.

<sup>27</sup> A recent account is to be found in G. Rando, 'L'italiano parlato d'Australia'. *La Fiamma* 25, p. 11 (11 February, 1971), pp. 10-14.



Social change has brought the Italian newcomer to the general public attention, particularly with the tolerance of second and third generation settlers. Another source too, for Australian acceptance of Italian, is literature, both the novels in which Italian characters appear and the short stories of E.O. Schlunke, a farmer of German stock, who was more than an amateur sociologist in tracing the course of assimilation of German migrants, as well as his affectionate depiction of the theme<sup>28</sup> of Italian prisoners of war.

Some idea of the toleration of Italian terms in literate Australian English may be gleaned from the following terminology used quite naturally by short story writer Desmond O'Grady<sup>29</sup> in a set of tales where few situations are deliberately evocative of Italian atmosphere. Thus, the following may be found in a quick inspection:

- in loose social banter; *chow* (p. 40), *Conquista* (p. 40), *bambino* (p. 41); *marde* (p. 43); *siesta*; *gnocchi* (p. 88); *signora*; *'scusi* (p. 136); *Italia è bella*; *corni* (sexual); *conformisti* (p. 161);
- in architecture and local description: *piazza*, *Piazza del Popolo* (p. 84); *the Porta Portese* (p. 87); *trattoria*; *Friulan words* (p. 125); *pensione*; *Via Ripetta* (p. 127); *Porta Maggiore*; *getto*; *palazzo* (p. 143).
- in trade names: *Fiat*, *Lambretta*, *Vespa*, *L'Unita*;
- in song titles etc., 'Oi Mari', 'Santa Lucia' (p. 40); 'Ostia d'amor' (p. 43); 'Bella Italia' (p. 139); 'Poveri ma Belli' (p. 157);
- in reference to (Roman Catholic) religion: *Gesù* (p. 41), *Dio*, *Natale*, *Pace*; *tutto* (fine) (p. 44); *Propaganda Fide College* (p. 83);
- in racial brawling: *no vendetta* (p. 43); *brutto* (p. 43);
- in nicknames - *Vesuvio* (for a man with reddish hair), (p. 45); *Giulio Cesare*,
- and in general vocabulary: *bicchieri* (tumbler) (p. 46); *sei* (six); *lire*; *permesso di soggiorno* (p. 133); *carbiniere*; *magnifico*; *pasta*.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, 'The Enthusiastic Prisoner', 'Cheap Labour', and 'The Man Who Liked Music' in *Stories of the Riverina*, by E.O. Schlunke (1965), Selected with an Introduction by Clement Semmler.

<sup>29</sup> In his collection, *A Long Way from Home*, Melbourne, F.W. Cheshire, 1966.

Comparable terms to these from O'Grady are used in the novels of Australian Philip Jones (b. 1919), many of which have Italian or Adriatic settings – e.g. *La Bora* (1961), *The Month of the Pearl* (1964) or *The Fifth Defector* (1967).

Since in the period 1945-1950 most immigrants of non-British stock were from eastern Europe, all were called indiscriminately: *Balt*, *New Australian* – *Naussie*, *Wog*,<sup>30</sup> or even *reffo* (*reff*, *reff* – *raff*), technically a Jewish refugee from Europe who had settled in Australia just before or just after World War II, but applied to all nationalities, particularly by the Australian of little education.<sup>31</sup> The use of *dago* in Australia has never been very common. It is perhaps important to consider this item, since the Americanization of Australian life, which began in the period 1942-45, has resulted in the transference into Australian colloquial speech of a very considerable amount of American slang, although it is still probably the case that this influence is resisted in rural areas. In all matters affecting popular lexis American influence must be allowed for.

The growth toward nationhood (and it has to be said), towards some racial intolerance (particularly towards southern Europeans) may be seen in the rise of clusters of Australian words for new groups in the community. While the Englishman could be called *pommy*, *pom*, *pom wog*, *homey*, *chum* and *choom*, the Italian was called *sky*, *eyeto*, *steak*, *ding*, and *dingbat*.<sup>32</sup> Of the last list, the first may come from the slang boxing phrase, *to sky the rag*, meaning 'to admit defeat' or 'to throw in the towel'. The second is a fairly obvious corruption of Italian, and is used in a vaguely derogatory way, while *steak* or *stake* comes from [steaka-da-oyst], an alleged pronunciation by an Italian restaurant owner of 'steak and oysters'. *Ding* and *dingbat*, the former a shortened form of the latter, are both from the phrase *to have the dingbats*, meaning 'to be in a temper' and presumably they mean someone whose mood

<sup>30</sup> The European migrant was sometimes called *wog wog*, the English *pom wog*, the American *yank wog*.

<sup>31</sup> The more educated term was *displaced person*.

<sup>32</sup> This particular list is given in Sidney J. Baker's *The Australian Language*, Second edition (1966), p. 262.

invokes dislike in the Australian or who acts in an apparently eccentric fashion.

The postwar migrant influence has been very diverse – the year-book currently lists a considerable number of countries of origin for its citizens – and so the influence of European New Australians has been fragmented and as a result, Australianism has begun to reassert itself, so that non-Australian elements are tending to cancel each other out, as the emphasis on the central stock continues afresh.

City terms for Italy (largely encountered in Australia and America between the wars) included: *Land of da Spaghette*, *Macaroniland*, *Mussolini land*,<sup>33</sup> *Tally*, *Wopland*. In the United States, the 1930s were the years associated with the phrase *the Italy of America* for Arizona.

The vocabulary of American English has been greatly enriched with borrowings from the languages of European settlers of Romance extraction. Thus, for example, Spanish words are not uncommon and the borrowed words reflect the nature of the contact, as in the clusters concerned with ranch life, such as *corral*, *lariat*, *lasso*, *rodeo*, *ranch*, *bucharoo* and *stampede*. The Italian contribution there is seen by most scholars as a foreign language<sup>34</sup> become more or less Anglicized through the incorporation of American words, like Pennsylvania German, or Polish and Yiddish, especially as they are spoken in crowded city communities. As most of these later migrant groups are directly engaged in manual occupations like

'laborers, janitors, truckmen, through all stages to that of the skilled artisan' – (*loc. cit.*),

it is very natural that they should take over many of the concrete terms of their trades and surroundings. While the more literary offerings here are slight, being mainly confined to national language newspapers printed in America, Italian, as modified by American

<sup>33</sup> Often associated with the Abyssinian campaign – 'There's a war in Abyninnia, / Won't ya come? / All ya need is ammunition and a gun,' etc.

<sup>34</sup> See G.P. Krapp, *The English Language in America* (1925) (reprint 1960) I, pp. 55-56.

English appears in some interesting literary performances, reviewed by Arthur Livingston.<sup>35</sup>

Much of the underworld and food terminology is indistinguishable between the two countries and the items best described as international Italian-English will be readily identified in the following pages.

There is not yet (and it is too early for) any research on the analogies between idiom and lexis of Australian-Italian and the Americanisms in Italian slang

e.g. *bomma* 'bum', encountered in Naples.  
or *briccoliere* 'bricklayer', encountered in Sicily.

Not all the American slang terms<sup>36</sup> for an Italian are common to both countries, although there are in common: *dago*, *gin* (rare), *gingo*, *guines*, *duke* (rare), *wop*, *Eytalian*, *macaroni*, *spaghette bender*, *Tally*, *Tony*. The term *Italian football* for 'bomb' is said to occur in Sydney's Mafia circle, as is (Italian) *pineapple* for 'a dynamite bomb'. The American equivalents *egg*, *love apple* and *guinea* are rare, although *torpedo* is used in both countries for a home-made bomb.

Slang (and often insulting) terms for Southern Europeans tend to be used indiscriminately in Australia for Italian, Spanish or the rare Portuguese. Thus these occur: *dago*, *dino*, *duke*, *greaser*, *greaseball* (more American), *spic*, *spig*, *spike*, *wop*, (any one of Italian stock, loosely applied to any foreigner of dark complexion, especially of the labouring class); *dago*, *gin*, *ghin*, *ginney*, *guinea*, *wop* (especially an Italian), etc.

Italian food was less tolerated at an earlier period and in the 1930s-1940s, spaghetti was called *Italian* or *wop special*, or *worms*, while *Italian storm* was used for spaghetti with garlic and *worms in blood* for spaghetti with tomato sauce. Garlic was called

<sup>35</sup> *loc. cit.* p. 156. A Livingston, 'La Mercia Sanemagogna' *Romanic Review*, IX (1918), pp. 206-226.

<sup>36</sup> See Lester V. Berrey and Melvin Van Den Bark, *The American Thesaurus of Slang*, A complete Reference Book of Colloquial Speech. New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1943. There is also a section on the Italians of New York City in Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, (1963).

*Italian perfume*, but the American *Haliatosis* for the same is not recorded. Macaroni was variously styled: *Italian special*, *straws* and *wop food*, while other terms overlapped with those for spaghetti. *Squirrel dumplings* and other phrases *in mal sens* were used for 'noodles'. The most popular word is *salami* which can be said to have become a part of the Australian diet.

The (Australian) language of this group is marked by various clusters of borrowings, — on the food side, *macaroni*, *ragou* or *umido* (savoury tomato stew), *cena* (the evening meal), *pranzo* (the midday meal/social dinner), *colazione* (the breakfast meal), *ravioli*, *tagliatelle* (home-made macaroni), *cannoli alla Siciliana* (a Sicilian speciality cake with whipped cream and sugars) and *cassata* (an ice-cream cake),<sup>37</sup> *minestrone*. As their chaplains have stressed the migrant cannot tolerate<sup>38</sup> the Australian (institutionalized) pattern of meals and the dishes associated with them. He set out to alter the prevailing situation. Consequently, so the story runs, when one Italian imported an espresso machine, the following years caused all Sydney to drink espresso coffee, publically at least. Amongst wines, *chianti* (once known as 'dago red' and thus confused with *red Ned*,) has become much more widely drunk and chianti bottles and their straw bags have become a standardized item in popular (or youthful) decor.

A form of pseudo-Italian had already been widespread in Australia, before the post-war influx and there were very many nicknames with hypocoristic forms employing the -o suffix, such as *Jimmo*, *Tommo*, *Jobno*, *Sallo*, *Daiso*, *Freddo* or *Betto*.<sup>39</sup> In the early 1950s, a Federal law was passed curbing haphazard changes of name by New Australians. Until then, many migrants, displaced persons and others had been able to blend into the background as apparent Australians. Baker quotes one case<sup>39</sup> of the Latin name Nazzareno Vincent Antonio Xuareb becoming the unpretentious

<sup>37</sup> This item became relatively popular in restaurants and milk-bars in the eastern states in the 1960s.

<sup>38</sup> A Capuchin Franciscan father tells the story of a migrant who regarded a Sydney migrant hostel as a concentration camp concerned to poison him, because of the Australian diet. (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, loc. cit.)

<sup>39</sup> *The Australian Language*, Second Edition, p. 276.

Morrie Wilson. This is in marked contrast with the Italianate suffix, *-etta*, which has made little progress (unlike the United States).

There is a group of slang words often thought to have some link with the migrant (Italian) stock, *beauto!* a term of approval; *bombo*, cheap wine; *Cappo*, a Capstan cigarette; *cazo*, someone injured in war or in an accident; *immigranto*, the broken English often spoken by a non-British migrant to Australia in his early days in the country (from *immigrant* and *Esperanto*); *migro*, an immigrant; *recepto*, reception; *topo* a topographical map. The source is the *-o* suffix fairly common in Australia since the end of the first World War, possibly as the result of soldier experience in France where it was a popular ending in the speech of those low in society. It is widely found in familiarly abbreviated forms<sup>40</sup> of place names, as in *Darlo*, Darlinghurst; *Kenso*, Kensington; *Paddo*, Paddington, as well as in given names such as *Daiso*, *Jim(m)o*, and *Tommo*. There is little extended written support for these usages. The *macchietta* (or '(Neapolitan) character sketch') seems to be known only to small clusters in Melbourne and as a now historic literary form.

Yet the problem with the loans is that they must differ from the 'learned' or trade Italian terms which entered Standard English after the Renaissance. Relatively few of the Italians who have come to Australia at any period have brought any genuine command of Standard Italian with them, and even those few, who had such a competence, spoke at home their local dialects, many of which were naturally unintelligible. As G. Andreoni observes,<sup>41</sup> there is an obvious consequence —

'In Australia, migrants from Lombardy and Venetia live with those from Calabria and Apulia, and, in order to communicate, as an old immigrant pointed out to me, they use this lingua franca which is a mixture of Australian English and Italian.'

The fate of this separate lingua franca can be predicted, — as the amalgam of Standard Italian, the various Italian dialects and

<sup>40</sup>See S.J. Baker, *The Australian Language*, second edition, pp. 366-69.

<sup>41</sup>p. 115 of his 'Australitalian' (pp. 114-119), *University Studies in History*, Volume V. No. 1, (1967).

common Australian, with the latter gradually prevailing.<sup>42</sup> It is probably the case that Australian loan-words now comprise as much as one third of the spoken language of these communities.

The vocabulary of Australitalian can be divided into three broad categories, as follows:

(a) Words for which a true Italian equivalent is lacking, because of the absence of absolute identity between the Australian thing or act and its Italian counterpart, e.g.:

*gliardi*, (yard); *visco*, (whiskey); *pichiniccó*, (picnic).

(b) Words whose Italian equivalents were generally unknown or unfamiliar to the migrant in his previous environment. e.g.:

*morgico*, mortgage; *bosso*, boss; *lista*, lease.

(c) Words that enter Australitalian by sheer force of their repetition by Australians and thus retain their 'basic' status, despite the fact that Italian may offer adequate and familiar alternatives.

e.g.: *carro*, car; *trampo*, tramp; *gambolo*, gambler; *cotto*, coat; *checca*, cake; *loncio*, lunch; *storo*, store.

The loans are many and Anglicization is the most common along traditional morphemic patterns:

abbordato	boarder
abricotto	apricot
adesso	address
baga	bag
barrista	bartender
beca	baker
becherista	baker
biccia	beach
billo	bill
besinisso	business
blocco	block
bordo	board
bosso	boss

<sup>42</sup>This situation also occurred in America, where the ensuing jargon is called American-Italian by A.M. Turano in 'The Speech of Little Italy', *American Mercury*. July, 1932, p. 357.

boto	boat
canna, canno	can
carpentieri	carpenter
chemista	chemist
cianza	chance
colle	coal
costume	customer
dicce	ditch
enveloppo	envelope
faitatore	boxer
farma	farm
farmista	farmer
fattoria	factory
forma	shape
fornitura	furniture
galone/gallone	gallon
geologista	geologist
giobba	job
gliarda, jarda	yard
globbo	club
grossiere	grocer
guardiano	keeper, watch
gum, gumma	chewing-gum
licenza	license
lotta	lot
meccio	match
marchetto, -a	market
mascina	machine
moni	money
morgico, morgheggio	mortgage
ovrecoto	overcoat
penta	pint
pepa	paper
petrolio	oil
piccio	moving picture
pipa	pipe
pondo	pound
psicologista	psychologist



pulizzimmo	policeman
quarto	quart
raida	ride
rivolvaro	revolver
sciabola	sabre
scio	show
scioppo, scioppa	shop
scolaro	pupil
sista	sister
sparagrassi <sup>43</sup>	asparagus
sprini, springi	springs
stic, stico	stick
stimbotto	steamboat
stocco	stock
sueta	sweater
tacsa	taxes
tichetta,-o	ticket
ticchettaio	ticket collector
ticia	teacher
tomato,-a	tomato
trocco	truck
uilbarro	wheelbarrow

Some borrowings are doublets, with the meaning twice, as in *canabuldogga*, from Italian *cane* (dog) and English 'bulldog.' A half-time banker is a *mezzo-barbiere*, with elements from both languages. Not infrequently words fall together, at least in spelling.<sup>44</sup> Thus, *cecca* (cheque) is to be contrasted with *cecca* (magpie) of Italian, while *rendita* (rent) at home meant 'income', and *libreria* means 'library' in Australitalian but 'bookstore' in Italian. The confusion between *fragrant* in English and Italian is played on, when the word is misplaced in Italian English and applied to wines.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup>This compares with Italian *asparago*, *sparagio*, as opposed to the Cockney *sparrow-grass*, common in Broad Australian.

<sup>44</sup>For similar phonetic reasons there is a similar collision of spellings in the Maori language, as it handles English concepts.

<sup>45</sup>Desmond O'Grady, *op. cit.*, p. 164. See also, for general problems, G. Rando, 'The semantic influence of English on Italian', *Italica* 48 (1971), 2, pp. 246-52.

There is less borrowing amongst adjectives, although many of the following are extremely common:

basso	low, short (cp. Italian use as noun 'bottom')
isi	easy
ruffo, roffo	rough
sciur	sure
sechenze	second-hand
smarto, smatto	smart
stinge	mean
stretta	narrow (cp. Italian <i>strada</i> 'street')

One of the places where the dialects of the Italian mainland reassert themselves is in personal pronouns, particularly in the attempted phonetic renditions of the second person pronoun as *tu, ti, te, voi, vi, du, di, de*, as well as *foi* and *fi*.

Italian given-names are on the increase. The following made names occurred in an inspection of one work from contemporary Australian fiction:<sup>46</sup>

Angelo; Aurelio; Emanuele; Francesco; Frederico; Gennaro; Giovanni; Giulio; Leo; Matteoti; Niccolo; Pietro; Salvatore; Sandoro; Sergio; Vittorio; Wladimiro.

Other common names include: *Antonio, Andrea, Carlo, Bartolomeo, Uberto, Tomaso* or *Vincenzo*. As in the United States of America,<sup>47</sup> *Giuseppe* and *Giacomo* are harder for the general speech community and are commonly changed to *Joseph* and *Jack* and *Olivieri* to *Oliver*. On the whole the influence of the priests keeps the Italians from going beyond Anglo-Saxon names, and well away from the more gaudy Jewish.

Female names are less common, as fits the pattern of fewer migrant women, and the removal from public life of most married women. Yet the charming Italian names for women have persisted, often with anglicization in 'mixed' (i.e. Italian-Irish) marriages, as in *Angela, Anita, Antonietta, Bianca, Carlotta, Claretta*,

<sup>46</sup> O'Grady, Desmond, *A Long Way from Home* (1966).

<sup>47</sup> Mencken, H.L. *The American Language*, Fourth edition (1936) p. 509.

*Giuliana, Lucia, Marina, Rosa and Scilla.*

While surnames in the early days of immigration were changed with some frequency, the tendency was arrested and there is not the same social pressure to 'assimilate' as was the case in the 1950s. Translations of names are found in some (more rural) families – as in: *Little* for *Piccolo*; *White* for *Bianco*; *Pope* for *Pape*; *Miller* for *Molinari*. Transliterations blurred and clipped forms also occur: *Rondy* for *Rondinone*; *Martinbussey* for *Martinuzzi*; *Low(e)ry* for *Lauria*; *Kelly*<sup>48</sup> for *Vaccarelli*; *Matzola* for *Mazzola*; *Kennedy* for *Canadeo*. Generally speaking this is related to the propensity of Italians to identify with their co-religionists, the Irish, amongst whom they frequently intermarried, particularly in the second generation phase. There is little tolerance for longer names and dissyllables of various types often replace them. In many cases the pronunciation of Italian names has been altered, particularly in the loss of the *-e*, *-o*, *-io*. Yet the refusal to modify is now making itself felt, particularly in the sugar-cane towns of North Queensland, where a degree of reversion is noticeable in such official lists as electoral rolls. Such Italian surnames are counter-balanced by the given names, since those of Italian-Australian stock do not observe the church's lists for permitted given-names, as is the case with Italians in Europe and the Americas.

Quite apart from the language influence and wartime contact with Italians, Australians may be said to have been influenced in various ways by Italy, – from Terrazzo floors to Neapolitan ice cream, from pilasters in domestic architecture to espresso coffee, from currently flamboyant male dress which can out-do Carnaby Street to the drinking of table wines in a way still largely uncommon in the British Isles, and for the source of a certain verve to be found in such Bohemian quarters as the largely Italian Newtown, adjacent to the University of Sydney.

As was stressed in a leading article<sup>49</sup> on Sydney's Italian Community some ten years ago –

'Of all the migrant groups in Sydney, the Italians are the most

<sup>48</sup> See, for comparison, Joseph G. Fucilla, 'The Anglicization of Italian Surnames in the United States', *American Speech*, Feb. 1943, pp. 26-32.

<sup>49</sup> 'Their Test for Living has influenced our Habits', by a Special Correspondent, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 30, 1961, p. 2.

dominant — temperamentally as well as numerically. They throw themselves into life as consummately in Woolloomooloo and Leichhardt as they do in Naples or New York's Little Italy. It is almost certainly true to say they they have changed Sydney more than Sydney has changed them.'

The precise extent to which post-war immigration has influenced the Australian way of life is not easy to assess, as the changes in this area come from greater travel, increasing internationalism and the information and media explosions and have affected very deeply the intellectual and social life of Australian society and its culture.

One of the difficulties in commenting on the fate of Italian language in Australia, and on the way in which, by eye transference or 'the etymological trap', senses flow from one language to the other, lies in the problems of language, dialect and necessary lingua franca. As F. Palazzi points out in his 'Nouissima grammatica italiana',<sup>50</sup> both language and dialect are a means of expressing one's thoughts and feelings, the language perhaps more for the culture, comprising history, poetry, science, law and religion, while the dialect tends to express the simple and personal needs of everyday life. Thus, social situations made the problem of language and dialect an issue before the migrants ever left Italy. It was complicated by the varying dialects used in the homeland, — quite apart from the Australian-Italian dialect used among the other settlers here, and the peculiar occupative problems and idioms necessitated by new work situations. Indeed it may be estimated that at the present time the number of persons of Italian stock in Australia (i.e. an admitted eighth or quarter in their ancestry) probably exceeds 400,000, while the number of persons in close (linguistic) contact with these may well number in excess of one million, or 7-8% of the total Australian population.

Although Italians generally 'assimilate' more easily than most ethnic groups for a variety of reasons, it is of great interest that each main regional group accepts the use of the English language without first reverting from the dialect to the Italian literary lan-

<sup>50</sup> Principato Editore, Milano, (1962), p. 5.

guage.<sup>51</sup> From the cultural point of view, any hopes that Italian migrants will be able to foster in Australia the knowledge of the Italian language, literature or art, will not be fulfilled.

An average Italian migrant in Australia has comparatively a greater difficulty in learning English than a north European migrant. The difference between the structure and phonetics of his own language and the English language as used in Australia is so great that it is doubtful whether an average adult Italian migrant can be fully assimilated linguistically.

Professor Borrie has some illuminating (and representative) points to make about various samplings of linguistic usage made in 1951 of Italians in Queensland. These may be summarized as follows.

'The children of Italian parents..... attended either State schools or Roman Catholic Church schools in which instruction was given only in English and in which Australian-born children were usually a large majority. The children thus rapidly became bilingual, and tended to use their native language extensively only in the home. From the questionnaire it was possible to analyse the language facility of 396 children. Of these some 13 declared that they could read and write only Italian, 294 that they could read and write only English, and 89 that they had facilities in both languages. None of the 63 children of Australian-Italian marriages could read and write only Italian, 18 were bilingual and 55 could read and write only English. In regard to the spoken language, a large proportion of the children were of necessity bilingual because of the inability of at least one parent to speak English. Fifty-five declared that they could not speak English, and 116 that they were bilingual. But in response to the question which asked children to state which language was usually spoken in the home, only 42 listed English and 258 Italian, while 96 declared that both languages were spoken. In about half the 63 cases of Italian-Australian marriages English was the language usually spoken at home: in 23 both Italian and English were used and Italian was the rule in 10.'

<sup>51</sup>See J.A. Hempel, *op. cit* pp. 117, ff. He quotes the example of a group in Brisbane in 1956, more than 90 per cent of whom could write in dialect.

The general conclusion reached from the questionnaire analysis relating to language was the very simple one that English is the normal language of Australian-Italian parents and that Italian remains the normal language of first generation Italian settlers, even after twenty years' residence in Australia, and that this situation usually requires the children to have some knowledge of Italian and the parents to have some knowledge of English.<sup>52</sup>

The individual belonging to the second generation speaks the dialect of his father, but not entirely correctly, words being introduced which do not belong to it. It is fairly well agreed, both for Australia and for America,<sup>53</sup> that the vocabulary of the second generation becomes more of a local variant of English rather than staying a form of Italian.

In some cases there is a need for coinages/borrowings in Australitalian since the concepts are foreign. Thus may be explained *ringo barcare* (ring barking), the process of incising a cut around the trunk of a forest tree to kill it ultimately and so clear the land for agriculture.

Australitalian would seem to be widely spoken and seldom written, yet there is some epistolary currency for various phrases:

*bigu*, be good; *dezzo*, that's all; *gudbai*, good-bye; *m'amusai* (I amused myself); *oche*, (O.K.); *rongue*, wrong way; *che peccato*, *un suono morto*, what a shame, ('a dead swan'); *uatsius*, (what's the use?); *è un bel bissenisse*, it is a nasty business.

Confusions of idiom and a form of barbaric colloquialism are features of Australitalian. Thus consider the following epistolary phrase:

Australitalian *è longo tempo che* – (It's a long time since...)  
 v. Italian *è da molto tempo che* – (It's a long time since...)  
*Molto* should be used in connection with time, while *lungo* is used mainly for distance and length.

But as far as auxiliary verbs, numbers pronouns, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections are concerned, these are usually used correctly in Australitalian.

<sup>52</sup>*Italians and Germans in Australia*, (1954) pp. 87-88.

<sup>53</sup>See respectively C. Gamba, *op. cit.* p. 60 and E. T. Miller, *Principles of Sociology* (1933), p. 123.

Anglicisms are to be found in Australitalian and these then find their way into Australian English.

**Table 5**

AUSTRALITALIAN	AUSTRALIAN	V. ITALIAN
arvesto	harvest	raccolto
moneta	money	denaro
cana	(sugar-) cane	canna
nido	I need	ho bisogno
landa	land	terra
barra	bar	taverna
contri	country	campagna
fait	fight	(combattimento battaglia)
pulizio	police	polizia, gendarmeria
giorge	judge	giudice, magistrato
dollari	dollars	dollaro
loffari	loafer	perdigiorno
carro	motor car	auto
toccho	talk	conversazione
oaré	hurray	arrivederci
laste	last	ultimo
tenne	ten	dieci
naite	night	notte

Most of the Australitalian verbs have senses other than those of Australian English, as the table indicates:

Some of the most difficult back formations occur in areas where the Italian population is slow in assimilation and its halting attempts at Australian lexis then cross from Australitalian to Broad Australian (i.e. working class speech), thence to more cultured or Educated Australian, especially in the literary depiction of direct speech in the situation of linguistic confrontation, where semantic confusion is a common feature.

Table 6

AUSTRALITALIAN	ITALIAN MEANING OF AUSTRALITALIAN	AUSTRALIAN MEANING OF AUSTRALITALIAN
abbordare	—	board
abusare	to make bad use of	to insult
applicare	to do the best one can	to put in order, formulate
draivare	to drive	to force, push
fissare	to establish/stare at	to make someone pay
fixare, fichisare	fix	to arrange
giocare	to play a game	to play (musically)
giumpare	jump	to move quickly
lodare	to praise	to load
parcare	to park (car)	to sit, stay

It has been suggested that the old fashioned (and more American) *sez you* may be a translation of *si dice*, but the source is almost certainly via the United States in the first instance.

Australitalian tends to have most of the normal difficulties in structure of the Italian speaking English, although they are not all encountered in an individual and then only under tension situations in the earlier period of domicile here. Yet Italian adults in Australian have to contend with the strong inhibitory influence which their mother tongue exercises in their successful learning of the new tongue. Faced with new words their tendency, until they are drilled out of it, is to pronounce the new words as if they were native to their own language. Similarly, in the situations in which they have to respond by using the new tongue, the tendency is to cast the new words into the structural patterns of their native tongue.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup>The Italian student and his problems are discussed in *English, A New Language: A bulletin for teachers of new Australians in continuation classes*, Vol. 3, No. 4. January 1953, pp. 2-16, which material is largely reproduced in a later issue of the same journal, Vol. 13, No. 2. November, 1971. pp. 23-42.



The recurrent mistakes in pronunciation may be generally grouped as follows:

- (1) the introduction of vowel sounds between consonants or after single or grouped consonants. e.g.  
*Scusa me. I losta the money.*
- (2) the stressing of vowels which are normally weakened in English.
- (3) the pronunciation of diphthongs as pure vowels.
- (4) the pronunciation of [θ] and [ð] as [S] and [Z]
- (5) the pronunciation of [W] as [V]
- (6) the dropping of the letter [h] and the trilling of the consonantal 'r'.

More specific points are listed below.

- (a) The letters k, y, and w do not occur in the Italian alphabet, and j and x occur very rarely. When j does occur, it is pronounced 'y'.
- (b) While English spelling is, generally, an unsafe guide to English pronunciation, Italian is much more phonetic and thus the intelligent learner will ask for *pronuncia figurata* (phonetic spelling).
- (c) Since almost all Italian words end in vowels there is the usual learner's tendency to introduce a redundant vowel after the final consonant in English –  
e.g. He's got a pick and *shovala*.
- (d) Dissyllables and polysyllables in Italian usually have their stress on the second last syllable e.g. *fratello*, *padre*, which can be carried across.
- (e) The nature of Italian stress is such that it does not lead to weakening of preceding/following syllables. Thus for 'attention' [tenʃn], the Italian will want to pronounce all the syllables, as in his 'attenzione'
- (f) As all Italian vowels are pure, there are problems with combinations of vowel sounds, as in English diphthongs, since even such Italian words as *mai*, *naufragio* and *poi* do not merge their clusters of vowel sounds.

The vowels and diphthongs of English which do not occur in Italian may be presented by the following sounds:

[æ], *bag*; [ə] *the*; [æ:] *her*; [ɛə], *air*; [ɪə], *dear*; [uə], *cure*; [ɔə] *or*; [ɔ:], *four*; [ʌ] *much*; [aʊə], *hour*; [aɪə], *fire*; [ɔ:] *all*. Strictly speaking the following sounds do not occur either; [aɪ], *bite*; [ɔɪ], *boy*; or [aʊ] *round*.

(g) Similarly, the following consonantal sounds do not exist in Italian:

[θ], as in *think*; [θ̃] in *they*;

[w], *west*; [z], *pleasure*;

[h], *bat*; [r], *red*.

Another problem is the Italian dialectal variant whereby among Neapolitans *d* and *t* in loan-words sometimes change to *r*, as in *siri*, *suri* or *zuri* for 'city'.

The difficulties of structure for Italians learning English in Australia are those encountered in the United States of America, on NATO bases, and elsewhere. They are given briefly here, for the sake of completeness, with some typical local examples.

1. The omission of subject pronouns comes about since the endings of Italian verbs ordinarily indicate person and number, and the subject pronouns, being seldom necessary for clearness are, therefore, frequently omitted.

English: I am Miss A.

Italian: Am the Miss A. (Sono la Signorina A.)

2. In Italian there are only two genders, masculine and feminine, and the absence of any neuter in their own language presents some initial difficulty to Italians.

Thus the typical error is the Australitalian 'The house is white, she is, white' (*Casa* is feminine). or 'My job - he is very hard'.

3. There is a difference between the Italian and English possessive adjectives and there is the temptation to include the definite article, as is correct in Italian, but not in (Australian) English:

English: This is my hand

Italian: This is the my hand (*Questa è la mia mano*).

4. The interrogative and negative in Italian and English cause certain problems:

(a) In English, inversion is the normal method for the question.

(He is here. Is he here? – He will go. Will he go?) Given the regular omission of the subject pronoun, this is frequently impossible in Italian, and so we have questions with the same word order as the affirmative.

E Vecchio. 'Is old' for 'He is old'.

E vecchio? Is old? for 'Is he old?'

(b) The regular English substitution of 'no' for 'not a' has no Italian parallel and so both 'she hasn't a husband' and 'she has no husband' are both expressed by the one sentence: 'Non ha marito'.

5. The Italian in Australia is reluctant to include 'it' in weather phrases. Thus 'it is raining today' becomes 'rains today', from 'Piove oggi', and there frequently occur Australian-Italian phrases like 'In summer is hot'.
6. Cardinal numerals in Italian cause various confusions in Australian situations, particularly with money matters. e.g. 'This costs hundred dollars/hundred five dollars'.
7. Since Italian uses *avere* (to have) to express age, the recurrent error is to give sentences like 'I *have* thirty five', or 'She has two and a half.'
8. While *the* is used for the Italian equivalents of *this, that, these, those*, the awkwardness in English does not come from this aspect of the definite articles but from the fact that, contrary to English usage, the definite article is required in Italian before nouns taken in a general sense.

Thus, English: Eyes are green

Italian: The eyes are green (Gli occhi sono verdi)

9. In Italian, cardinals are used for days of the month and the connective 'of' does not occur. Thus *Il ventiquattro dicembre* leads to an English 'The twenty-four December', in place of the idiomatic 'The twenty-fourth of December'.
10. Time when is relatively easy for Italians to express in English, but certain contrasts between the languages cause the following types of imgrammatical idioms –
  - (i) 'I go to school Monday', since Italian has no preposition 'on' before days of the week.
  - (ii) 'I came to Australia in the 1959', since the Italian definite

article is used in addition to the preposition (*nel* 1959).

(iii) 'I came here at six o'clock/at ten to six' of ordinary English, since Italian uses the definite article in addition to the preposition (*alle sei, alle sei meno dieci*) is matched by Italian English 'I came here at the six/at the six less ten.'

11. Australian Italians want to say 'Listen! I talk to you now', since Italian has no present continuous distinct in form from the present of habit. They will use 'I drink' where 'I'm drinking' would be better, since Italian has only *bero*.
12. Since Italian has no present continuous, it follows that it has no short answer forms like those in English. Thus, 'Are you reading?' is replied to by the unidiomatic 'I read.'
13. Adverbial particles cause difficulty since they are not differentiated from prepositional ones. Thus the common error is to insert both uses when only one is required. Thus:

He is putting *on* his hat *on* his head.

He is taking *off* the hammer *off* the shelf.

The confusion would seem to arise partly from the double functions of the words, partly from the fact that in Italian a single verb normally expresses what is conveyed in English by a verb and adverbial particle. For *mettete* means 'to put on' and *togliere* means 'to take off'.

14. The comparative and superlative in Italian, is based on 'more/most' (as opposed to suffixes - 'er/est') - *bella, più bella, la più bella*, and this causes little confusion. But comparisons when translated lead to sentences like 'He is taller of me', as 'than' = 'di' in Italian, and as 'di' is commonly equivalent to the English 'of'. Other confusions are associated with the following idioms:

(a) The 'one' - which (one)? is a pronominal usage which has no parallel in Italian, where the reference is made clear through the inflection of the word used. Thus 'the black one' would be either 'il nero' or 'la nera', according as a masculine or feminine object were meant.

(b) The formation and normal use of the future affirmative do not present any particular difficulty to Italian speakers, but problems may arise with the interrogative and negative forms of the English future. Thus two common forms of Australitian

English are –  
 Will come Mary tomorrow? and  
 Won't come Mary tomorrow?

(c) The tenses in subordinate clauses and 'when' do not cause difficulty if 'when' = 'whenever', as the use of the present after 'when' is common to both English and Latin.

Yet when the sentence pattern is principal clause in the future tense, and adverbial clause in the present tense, there is likely to be the influence of Italian, where both clauses are future. Thus, common type sentences are:

I'll buy some shoes when I'll go to town, or, I'll have a cup of tea when I'll be thirsty.

As opposed to the situation with Italians of adult years and amongst those engaged in heavy manual work in rural areas, there is a relatively rapid linguistic assimilation of younger people both amongst those born in Australia and those born in Italy. This is accelerated in the school situation where English is the language used both during and after school hours. The young retain a knowledge of the original dialect only so far as it is necessary to converse with their parents, or, as is more often the case, with their grandparents.<sup>55</sup> This language which was often almost a familial private one is/was a curious mixture of the Italian dialect and the English language. But, as the census table at the beginning of the article indicated, the Italian immigration fell off during the mid-60s, and it may well be that Australian English has assimilated Australitalian, even as Australia has absorbed its speakers.

Perhaps the future linguistic work on the inter-relation between Italian and Australian English will depend on a detailed knowledge of the original dialects of the immigrants, since it may well be that the impetus towards inventing anglicisms came in those areas of language where the dialects most diverge. It is certain that the Italian newspapers of Melbourne and Sydney will merit

<sup>55</sup> There was a considerable problem from 1946 to 1960 to get the married immigrant women to attempt to learn English, particularly in the older age groups. The ratio of men to women in all learners classes was very high.

detailed study in the future for many types of coinage and semantic change. It is even possible that dialect dictionaries of the future will record the currency of various loans from Italian, such as the (obsolete) West Australian *raisi*, for 'skipper', a Sicilian form originally.

Other investigations may well study Australitalian regionally in Australia to find out whether there are marked regional variations and whether these are directly related to local needs. Thus, J.A. Sharwood's 'The speech of the Italian community of Northern Queensland'<sup>56</sup> (1965) is an analytical study of the Italian language spoken by Italian migrants and their families in the districts of Innisfail and Ingham, to discover whether there are particular phonological, syntactical or lexical features in the English conversational speech of local residents, both of Italian and of Australian descent, which might be attributed to the influence of the large Italian-speaking population there.

So far as the spoken language is concerned, there are indications that the children of migrant descent are now being encouraged to acquire the language which should be part of their European heritage, which has been lost by the all too successful assimilation.<sup>57</sup> As the then leading Australian newspaper reported in 1961 –

'All the time it's assimilate, assimilate' one migrant leader told me. 'You are under such pressure here. After a while you get a bit irritated. They're overdoing it.' 'Assimilation – that silly word'. 'another said 'Integration. That's the word.' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, June 30, 1961, p. 2.)

The young are either growing away from their parents, or the parents themselves want their children to have the language which they have lost, to retain some measure of *italianità*.

<sup>56</sup>M.A. Thesis, University of Queensland. The same scholar is working at present on the vocabulary of the dried fruits industry along the Murray River valley in an area from Swan Hill in Victoria to Cadell in South Australia.

<sup>57</sup>See C.A. McCormick, 'Italian and Assimilation', *Babel*, No. 26, July, 1964, pp. 2-4; and Elisabeth Wynhausen, 'Teaching Australians how to be Greeks', *The Bulletin*, October 9, 1971, pp. 41-42.

There has never been an annual quota for migrants to Australia, so much as a series of targets based essentially upon economic absorptive capacity as assessed by the national departments of immigration and labour in consultation with their advisory bodies. Although the numbers have varied greatly in accordance with economic conditions, the policy was always administered to preserve some of the features of the United States 'national origins' system. Nevertheless, during the decade ending 1954, the fact that Italians had the largest flow of any one nationality revealed how extensive had been the change in public opinion since pre-war days.

On the whole, the Italians have broken the original 'group settlement' of the cane fields and the inner Melbourne suburbs, although there are notable exceptions to this, as with the Piedmontesi and Sicilians in North Queensland and the Calabrian group settlement at Griffith, New South Wales, which built up by the chain migration processes started by the Italian consul in the early nineteen-twenties. And while many earlier illiterate northern and southern Italian peasants could barely speak, let alone read or write Florentine Italian, and had only the vaguest notions of Italian culture and history, this situation changed with the second generation and the disintegrating group settlements gradually became assimilated into the host society, through the phases of clubs and then concern for cultural survival. Language has moved through a like series of stages, from local dialect, to Australitalian to Australian English with vestigial survivals, to a final stage where the traditional language is learned afresh by those of migrant descent as a means of enriching themselves as people.

## APPENDIX

Malta's impact on Australia has been relatively slight and the increase in numbers has been so recent as to make it scarcely possible for them to have been any linguistic<sup>58</sup> influence. Thus, at the Census taken on June 30, 1933, there were in residence 2,782 of Maltese birth, beside 26,693 of Italian. The number of Maltese has always been much smaller than the Italian and concentrated in the states of New South Wales and Victoria, as the following table indicates.

Table 7

Census at June 30, 1966.	
Population by States.	
STATE	NUMBER
New South Wales	23,779
Victoria	26,452
Queensland	2,146
South Australia	2,258
Western Australia	760
Tasmania	79
Northern Territory	25
Australian Capital Territory	305
Australia (total).	55,104*

\*This constituted a sharp increase on the total of 39,337 in the Census of June 30, 1961.

There are concentrations of Maltese in certain farming communities, notably at Mackay in North Queensland.

<sup>58</sup>The slang term, 'Maltese holiday' is obsolescent in Australian English and it is held to have the root meaning 'Heavy air-raid' from the air attacks on Malta during the Second World War.