

Path 5 Linguistic Credits

1. Loanwords

The words we use every day come from Latin, Greek, Arabic and, in more recent times, from English, French and Spanish. But this is nothing extraordinary: nowadays people of different languages are constantly in contact, in some way or another, and they have mutual influence in many cases. No language is immune to “intercourse”, that is the phenomenon of constant exchanging of elements between different languages.

Sometimes words are adopted because, for obvious reasons, in some languages there are no words to define a new object or a new concept. For example, oranges and lemons were not known in our peninsula before they were imported from the Arabs. In the same way the number zero, that missed in the Ancient Romans’ number system, came from the Arabs. In the past, Turkish people imported the word ‘coffee’, likely Spanish people (from Haitian language) imported the words ‘potatoes’ and ‘cocoa’.

We already know some French and Spanish words, even if we have never studied them. In Italy, in fact, we use many “borrowed” words by our transalpine cousins, which make part of gastronomy, fashion, show, and car racing glossary. Some examples? *Croissant, foulard, camion, suit, omelette, moquette, taxi, bricolage, purée* and many others. After English, the foreign language that has influenced the most Italian language in the second half of the 20th century is Latin American Spanish, with many words belonging to the semantic field of politics (*golpe, desaparecidos, guerrilla, populismo...*), of soccer (*ola, goleador, goleada...*) of music (*lambada, merengue, salsa...*) and many others more, well known as telenovela and murales (López, 2001).

Nevertheless, there is the inverse phenomenon too, that is Italian words adopted by Latin American Spanish language. For example, especially in Argentina and in Uruguay, they use many terms of Italian origin brought in by a lot of immigrants who, between the 19th and the 20th centuries, left the peninsula. Italian domination in Eritrea has left some memory in the Tigre vocabulary, words indicating objects that made their first appearance in the country with the arrival of the Italian people. From “pompa” (of water) in “bumba”, which today signify also tap water; “boccia” (bowling) in “bucia”, which is still a game practiced with stones. Languages meet and mix together, incessantly.

So: where do some words that we use every day come from? Let’s play the game of words’ origin hunt! With the help of a good Italian dictionary that also includes words’ etymology, we can discover the Arabic origin of Italian words like: *zafferano, divano, dogana, magazzino, arancia, cotone...* We can do the same operation with words from English, French and Spanish. Let’s try to formulate an hypothesis on why there are these words in our language!

2. Linguistic Loans from Arabic

In Italian, there are about 600 words of Arab origin or words coming from other languages but adopted in Italian through Arabic (Lantieri, 1991). They are not only a clear sign of ancient connections between Italy and Europe and the Arab world, but also show ideas, concepts and products that we have learnt from the Arabs. Some examples are:

Melanzana (Eggplant)	الباذنجان	(Bādhnjān)
Carciofo (Artichoke)	خرشوف	(Khrshhwf)
Limone (Lemon)	ليمون	(Lymwn)
Mummia (Mummy)	مومياء	(Mwmyā’)
Giraffa (Giraffa)	زرافة	(Zrāfh)
Albicocca (Apricot)	مشمش	(Mshmsh)

Let's try to pronounce them aloud in Arabic, memorizing them (the pronunciation is in brackets). Then, let's play and find others. Perhaps we can ask for help from an Arabic friend or acquaintance.

Some examples of these words from Arabic:

Assassino (Killer/Assassin)

- It derives from the Arabic word *hashishiyyo* or also *hashshashiyya*, which means literally hashish smoker.

Dogana (Customs)

- It comes from the Arabic word *diwan(a)*, which is the book where the goods in transit were reported.

Magazzino (Warehouse)

- It comes from the Arabic word - in its plural form - *makhāzin*, which means deposits.

Baldacchino (Canopy)

- It comes from the Arabic word *Bagdādī*, adjective with the meaning of "from Baghdad", that already in the Orient meant both "a precious fabric of Baghdad" and "cupola-shaped ornament, that towers over anything else".

Algebra (Algebra)

- Algebra is a word that was introduced by Leonardo Fibonacci with the famous *Liber Abbaci* (1202) and comes from the Arabic word *ilm al-gibar wa al-muqa bala*, which is the science of reductions and comparisons (oppositions).

Elisir (Elixir)

- In Italian "elisir" indicates a liquor with energizing power. The etymology is from the Arabic word *al-iksir*, Philosopher's Stone also effective as a medicament in form of a dry substance. The first origin is in fact from the Greek word *xerós*, dry.

Meschino (Miserable, Petty)

- This word comes directly from the Arabic word *miskin* (in turn, maybe of a far Akkadian ancestry), which means "poor, miserable." It was documented in Spain in the 10th century and, during the next one, in France.

3. Linguistic Credits from France

Through the study of the "linguistic loans" from French, you can learn the first rules about pronunciation, that is the correlations between "how it is uttered" and "how it is written", because – unlikely than Italian language - you write French in a way and often pronounce it in another way. Thus, doing some research, you can approach French culture and discover many curiosities, such as:

Chauffeur

- It derives from the French verb "chauffer" and in Italian means "to heat/to warm up." It is used for the first time in 1680 indicating "the one who feeds the fire"; later, it meant the "stoker of a steam engine" because the first automobiles used steam engines. The word became popular and it is used still today to indicate the driver of the motor vehicle.

Croissant

- The literal meaning of the word is "increasing" and it is the typical half-moon sweet bun. The first croissants were prepared in Vienna after the final siege of the city in memory of the

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defeat of the Turkish half-moon. When Mary Antoinette, almost one century later, was betrothed to Luis XVI of France and then married him, she taught the French bakers the preparation of this dessert pastry.

Panne (Breakdown)

- It is to be linked with a nautical term used in 1500's, when ships went sailing. The expression "in panne" (*broken down or out of orders*) indicated the operation done in order to immobilize the sails during navigation. In this way, the ships stopped like a car "in panne".

Restaurant

- The word "Restaurant" was used for the first time in the 16th century to indicate a very tasty soup created by a French cook. In 1760, this soup was so famous that the cook decided to open a tavern in Paris and called it "Restaurant", like his creation.

Tailleur (Suit)

- The origin of the name "tailleur" comes from the end of the 19th century and derives from the fact that its creation was inspired by the clothes made by a men's tailor instead of a women's tailor. "Tailleur" was in fact the men's tailor and "Couturier" the women's tailor.

Taxi

- The origin of the word "taxi" is the taximeter, a device that counts the amount payable for a trip on a public vehicle. At the beginning of the 1900's, the public car was indicated as "voiture a taxi mètre"; shortly after, it was named only "taximètre", finally abbreviated in taxi with a further contraction.

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