Words Leading an Independent Life: Four Anglicisms in the Italian Lexis of Economics
Paola Gaudio
Aggregate Professor of English Language and Translation at the Department of Economics and Finance, University of Bari “Aldo Moro”
Corresponding Author: Paola Gaudio, E-mail: paola.gaudio@uniba.it

ARTICLE INFO

Received: November 10, 2018
Accepted: November 20, 2018
Published: November 30, 2018
Volume: 1
Issue: 4
DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2018.1.4.14

KEYWORDS
Anglicisms, borrowings, economics, Italian, lexis, translation

ABSTRACT
This paper revolves around the issue of the spread of English, and aims at illustrating the different strategies implemented by those languages that are being affected by it, in particular Italian. This spreading is an ever increasing phenomenon that is currently taking place at world level: Anglicisms in Italian, in French, in German or, for that matter, in any other language, are a strong indication of how English is penetrating within our cultures, regardless of how different these cultures can be to begin with. The specialized language of economics, for its inherently global nature, is one of the areas affected most by this process. Therefore, four English lexical items related to the domain of economics (i.e.: ‘broker’, ‘star-up’, ‘joint venture’, and ‘business angels’) are analyzed as they are used in Italian. The paper will show how linguistic borrowing – even when considering non-adapted loanwords only – takes place in different ways and with different levels of success. In order to elicit results as scientifically sound and reliable as possible, two parallel corpora have been taken into consideration: the Official Journal of the European Union and the transcripts of the debates held in the European Parliament. The pool from which data have been drawn adds up to a total of more than 15 million tokens.

INTRODUCTION
We all are witnesses to how English is unrelentingly and unwaveringly spreading throughout our globalized societies. It is a worldwide phenomenon, common to cultures as diverse as the Italian, the Russian or, further east, the Japanese – to name but a few. Newspapers, TV series, movies, the fashion industry, not to mention anything computer-related, seethes with Anglicisms: sometimes loanwords are adapted, other times they are simply incorporated in our languages just as they are, with very little or no adaptation at all. Indeed, this last trend seems to be becoming stronger and stronger as the laymen grow more and more familiar with and accustomed to the presence of foreign words in their native language. Of course Anglicisms are not unique to the 21st century, as they have also occurred in earlier periods of our history: for example, a noteworthy big boom in the use of Anglicisms can be traced back to the late 40s and 50s (Görllach, 2002, p. 3) – just after the Second World War – at least as far as Western countries are concerned. In the case of ex-communist countries, the boom took place in the 90s, coinciding with the fall of the economic and political barriers to the free flow of capital, information and people. Therefore, in spite of our origins, our history, and therefore our Weltanschauung – our view of the world – being different, we do share the same destiny when it comes to English. Anglicisms are just all over the place.

English, then, as the language of globalization. Some may point to the spread of English as to a form of linguistic imperialism, where English becomes the means by which Western ideas flood our societies (Widdowson, 2003, p. 45). For sure we all are – although probably to different degrees – subject to its influence, which is not only lexical but conceptual as well. In fact the influence exerted by one language upon another can never be exclusively linguistic, and this as a direct result of the very close relationship between linguistic expression and view of the world: between what a language can express, and what it actually expresses in order to meet the communicative needs of its speakers (Jakobson 1985, p. 110). Language – as Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf have already pointed out so admirably with their principle of linguistic relativity (Whorf,
1956) – influences the ways one thinks and behaves. So, when a language borrows some words from another language, it is importing much more than mere lexical labels to attach to objects or entities: it also imports a way of constructing reality through those very labels.

Henry Widdowson (2003, p. 45) uses the word ‘spread’ to refer to the dissemination of English in the most diverse languages, and he emphasizes the potential lack of agency that this ergative verb implies: somebody or something (some political or economical power maybe) is spreading English or, more simply, English is spreading – with no agency, no outer guidance, no exertion of power, it is simply and naturally spreading – just like a disease or a virus (without necessarily having the same negative connotations carried by these words).

Such spreading is taking place not only geographically but also socially, affecting the modes of expression and possibly also the modes of thought of wide strata of society. If therefore, in the past, the influence of English was limited to well-defined areas like pop music, for example, or computer sciences, currently it not only reaches out to our daily lives, but by now affects most, if not all, specialized languages. It is precisely one of these specialized languages that this paper revolves around – namely, the language of economics.

Even so, I would take distance from the view that considers English (or any other language for that matter) as exclusively tantamount to linguistic imperialism. Things can be seen from quite another perspective. Languages are alive, and they each live a life of their own. Words too. What happens in today’s society is that languages such as Italian (or any other, for that matter) get in touch with foreign (English) words, incorporate them into their linguistic system and appropriate them. Once these words have been borrowed and therefore appropriated, they start a new life: they may acquire new meanings, they may lose some of their old ones, and they can change – morphologically, semantically, even syntactically. In other words, they begin to live a brand new life, a life of their own.

Seen from this perspective, the spread of English ceases to appear a socio-linguistic invasion at the hands of the colonizers, and becomes itself the victim of a moulding process carried out by the innumerable worldwide users of this language. Especially within the domain of specialized areas – and therefore within closed communities of language users that need not at all be native speakers, because they belong in their circle by upbringing and by formal education, like indeed economists, doctors, lawyers, or scientists – changes do happen pursuant to an appropriation of the language by those who use it. This is especially true to the point of being unavoidable when – within that globalized village our world has become – such non-native users of English tend to take the specialized lexis and use it in their own language, thus ultimately appropriating it.

Be it as it may, the spread of English can definitely be considered a very complex process that calls upon important issues such as power and ideology. As is often the case when it comes to these matters, though, boundaries are never clear cut and the analysis of facts lends itself to speculation, revealing – as it often does – hidden, subtle and possibly paradoxical dynamisms.

However, if a general discourse would call into question the most varied socio-cultural, economic and political issues, a more focused analysis allows for greater analytical observation of the matters at stake. And it is for this reason that the focus of this paper will be limited to a well precise area of interest: the non-adapted English loanwords that are currently used in the Italian lexis of economics.

**METHODOLOGY**

In order to carry out the analysis of the borrowings selected, two parallel corpora have been created: one comprising the issues of the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) spanning over a period of six months (adding up to more than ten million tokens), and the other comprising the transcripts of the debates held in the European Parliament spanning over a period of ten months (adding up to five million tokens). Both corpora are parallel, this means that each text has two versions: one in English and the other in Italian. However, strictly speaking, it is not possible to distinguish between source text and target text, or between original and translation, since all texts were produced in more than one language to begin with. Besides, from a legal point of view, each version shares the same status as all other EU official languages. The European Union legislation in fact provides that documents produced by any of its institutions should be on an equal footing with each other – regardless of the language they were initially produced in – because each version is to be considered authentic.
The original texts from both languages, which are comprised in the two corpora, can be found online at the official websites of the Official Journal of the European Union¹ and of the European Parliament² respectively.

ANALYSIS OF FOUR NON-ADAPTED ANGLICISMS

What follows is the analysis of four non-adapted Anglicisms from the language of economics: ‘broker’, ‘joint venture’, ‘start-up’, and ‘business angels’. These terms are commonly used by the language communities that use Italian for business, for commerce, or for other economics-related purposes. However, borrowing is never a simple process because, in the transfer from one language into another (in this case, from English into Italian), words inevitably change over time and depending on their context of usage: as already suggested, they may take on new meanings or lose some of the old, and consistency in the way they are used is more of a theoretical abstraction than an actual reality. In fact, what will be observed with reference to each of the words selected are the various forms a word can take, both lexically and semantically: at times the English term is borrowed as is, without any major adaptation (apart from the phonetic one, which is just unavoidable if the languages in question use different phonetic systems); other times it is translated into the receiving language, even though the original loanword is already well-established; some other times instead, the Anglicism is paradoxically used to translate a range of English words that are only loosely connected with the semantic meaning of the etymology concerned.

‘Broker’

The first example is ‘broker’. In the English corpus of the Official Journal and of the Parliamentary debates combined, there are 21 occurrences of ‘broker’ and 35 of its derivative forms (the noun ‘brokerage’, the verb ‘to broker’, and the verbal forms ‘brokering’ and ‘brokered’). In the Italian version instead, there are only 14 occurrences of ‘broker’ (as noun), plus two instances of ‘brokeraggio’, a calque from ‘brokerage’:

As can be seen from the concordance lines above (figure 1), at times ‘broker’ is given between parenthesis after the Italian translation ‘mediatore’ (lines 1, 2 and 3) – as if, ‘mediatore’ being a more general word, ‘broker’ represented the more technically proper term. All in all, it would seem that the loanword ‘broker’ coexists with its Italian translations. However, in three cases, the Italian text has ‘broker’ as an equivalent for the English words ‘trader’, ‘stockbroker’, and ‘promoter’: it is as though ‘broker’ in qua Anglicism, seems to be a more effective translation of English near-synonyms of ‘broker’ which have not been borrowed by Italian (yet):

Excluding the verbal forms and the noun ‘brokerage’, and taking into consideration only the noun with its plural ‘brokers’, there are 10 cases in which the term is translated into Italian:

Here follows instead a selection of the derivative forms – i.e.: the noun ‘brokerage’, the verb ‘to broker’, and the verbal forms ‘brokering’ and ‘brokered’ – with their respective translations:

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² http://www.europarl.europa.eu/portal/en
The conclusion that can be drawn from these data is that the noun ‘broker’ appears commonly in the Italian lexis of economics, and it is widespread enough to also translate other English words (i.e.: ‘promoters’, ‘stockbrokers’, and ‘traders’ – fig. 2-3). However, the English form has not completely replaced the equivalent Italian translations (i.e.: ‘mediatore’, ‘intermediario’, ‘agente’, etc.), and this is also proved by the fact that, in three cases, ‘broker’ appears between parenthesis, only after its Italian translation.

On the other hand, with regard to the verbal forms, the dissemination of ‘to broker’ and its derivatives seems much less widespread: in fact, none of the translations above (fig. 6-7) renders ‘to broker’, ‘broking’, or ‘brokered’ with an Anglicism (a partial exception being ‘brokerage’, with its calque ‘brokeraggio’ in figure 1, lines 15 and 16).

If therefore ‘broker’ and its derivatives alternate between a plain usage of the English loanword and its fully Italian translations, our second example poses problems of an entirely different nature.

‘Start-up’

As a matter of fact, at first glance it would seem that the use of this English loanword in the Italian corpora is particularly limited, with only 9 occurrences against the 138 to be found in the English texts. However, a difference needs to be made between ‘start-up’ and ‘start up’ – with the hyphen or without the hyphen. Whereas ‘start-up’ (with a hyphen) tends to indicate the noun referring to a new business, ‘start up’ without the hyphen may more likely refer to the verb ‘to start up’ or to a more general use of the word, not related to economics, as in the noun phrase ‘the vehicle start up procedure’.

In Italian, the English borrowing is exclusively used to express the economics-related meaning, it is therefore not a coincidence that all nine occurrences of ‘start-up’ in the Italian corpora occur with a hyphen:

Regarding the English corpora, there are in all 83 instances between ‘start-up’ and its plural ‘start-ups’ (we are exclusively considering instances that occur with a hyphen). As we have seen, only nine of them are rendered in Italian with the English loanword. It should be emphasized that, mostly, the rest of the occurrences do not concern economics but are related to the semantic fields of mechanics and information technologies (the most frequent collocates being ‘engine’, ‘vehicle’, ‘driver’, and ‘device’), as shown by the following concordance lines:

These of course are fully translated into Italian, but an analysis of their translation would be well beyond the scope of this paper. What is interesting instead is to notice how ‘start-up’ is otherwise translated within an economics-related context:

‘market’ acting as a verb with the hyphen ‘market-making’, with the noun ‘market’ can also be rendered as ‘mercati’ in Italian:

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These of course are fully translated into Italian, but an analysis of their translation would be well beyond the scope of this paper. What is interesting instead is to notice how ‘start-up’ is otherwise translated within an economics-related context:
For the most part, ‘start-up’ gets translated with ‘avviamento’ (the concordance lines above are only a small selection of the about 50 occurrences of ‘start-up’ within an economics context, but they are totally representative of the general trend). ‘Avvio’ (line 10) is just a synonym for ‘avviamento’ and, apart from this, exceptions are rare and far between.

Therefore, just like the case of ‘broker’, ‘start-up’ also presents a certain degree of variability.

‘Joint venture’

Things change dramatically with our two next examples, which present a much higher degree of consistency. Consider ‘joint venture’ first:

For the most part, ‘joint venture’ gets translated with ‘impresa comuni’ (‘imprese comuni’, fig. 14, line 1), but this translation is followed right away by the formal group given between parenthesis – almost as if the author of the text wanted to clarify that this is really meant by ‘imprese comuni’ in fact ‘joint ventures’.

The other partial exception is the following:

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Rispetto ai finanziamenti effettuati dai business angels, Investbx si distingue, da un lato, in quanto facilita la fornitura di volumi più ingenti di capitale proprio e, d’altro lato, in quanto impone un maggiore livello di divulgazione di informazioni e di studi indipendenti [rispetto ai business angels]. Benché alcune rete o consorzi di business angels siano in grado di...[3]

One last but not least remark concerning ‘business angels’ is that, contrary to the well-established Italian norm that any borrowed word should always be used in the singular even when it is semantically plural (as has already been shown with ‘joint venture’), in this case the opposite is true: not only ‘business angels’ is consistently used in the plural when its meaning is plural, but it is plural even when in English it is indeed singular (lines 5 and 6).

CONCLUSION

The four Anglicisms that have been examined exemplify different degrees of appropriation of some English words on the part of Italian: at times the appropriation is so complete that the etymon can even violate a well-established morphological rule, like the one providing that foreign words are to be used exclusively in the singular and not in the plural. And this was the case with ‘business angels’. Similarly, ‘joint venture’ has entered the Italian lexis of economics with a fairly sound level of success: it would be interesting to further investigate the only exception that popped up during the analysis (‘joint venture’ rendered with ‘comitato congiunto’), and verify whether it is to be found in other corpora too. Also, ‘start-up’ and ‘broker’ show a noteworthy presence in Italian, even if in these cases the non-adapted Anglicisms alternate with their fully Italian equivalents. Only time will tell whether these translations are bound to become obsolete and be altogether replaced by the Anglicism, or vice versa.

Finally, it seems only fair to specify that it would be a mistake to generalize the results provided. These refer exclusively to the texts of the corpora considered and, even though they are objectively true and scientifically repeatable – being drawn as they are from a pool of more than 15 million tokens – generalization is always a delicate matter. For this reason, further research would certainly be desirable, both from a diachronic and from a synchronic perspective. What stands, though, is the indication of how differently words can behave in a foreign (socio-linguistic) environment, and of how different the lives that they lead can be.

And, therefore, conclusions can indeed be drawn: in order to explain the reasons for the different behaviours observed in the four Anglicisms considered, we need to go back to what was suggested at the beginning of this paper with a relativist Sapir-Whorfian bias, i.e. that every language uses different lexical labels to express different concepts. Since each language is the realization of a unique way to view the world and hence to categorize reality, and since, as Jakobson so poignantly pointed out, a language’s peculiar syntactical and lexical structure responds to the communicative needs of its speakers, it follows that the Anglicisms at stake respond to very precise communicative and expressive meanings that were not met by the previously existing Italian lexis.

This, of course, applies to varying degrees of lexical integration. It can be fairly positively assumed that ‘business angels’, along with ‘joint venture’, has filled a void: in fact in the Italian lexis there are no equivalents of these two lexical items, unless we resort to longish and unpalatable sequences such as ‘investitori informali di capitale di rischio’ or the not quite so expressive ‘associazione in partecipazione’ or ‘compartecipazione aziendale’: ‘business angels’ and ‘joint venture’ have come in handy to the Italian businessman (or woman) looking for succinct ways to express those very meanings.

On the other hand, ‘broker’ and ‘start-up’ do have equivalents in Italian, but what the Anglicism has offered to the Italian business professional is the immediate economics-related connotations associated with those borrowings. As a matter of fact, it can be argued that the equivalent of ‘broker’ be ‘mediatore’, ‘agente’, or ‘intermediario’ – however, these terms are extremely versatile in their polysemy and can be applied to a variety of semantic fields: a ‘mediatore’ can refer to, for example, an interpreter (‘mediatore linguistico’), and ‘agente’ can mean ‘police officer’ for that matter, whereas ‘intermediario’ expresses such a general concept that it can hardly be considered an exclusively economic term. Likewise,
'avviamento' (the equivalent of ‘start-up’) may refer – just like in English – to a variety of semantic fields: it can be the ‘avviamento’ (‘start up’) of an engine or of a conversation, but it is only the field of economics that the Anglicism refers to.

Hence, with all the different degrees of adaptation respectively shown by ‘broker’, ‘start-up’, ‘joint venture’ and ‘business angels’, these Anglicisms respond quite clearly to very specific linguistic needs, and the different lives these words lead can be accounted for in terms of the need of the Italian language to fill some pre-existing voids in its lexis of economics.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

Paola Gaudio is Aggregate Professor of English Language and Translation at the Department of Economics and Finance, University of Bari “Aldo Moro”, Italy. Her academic interests revolve around translation theory and practice, specialized languages, corpus studies, and XIX-XX century anglophone literature.

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