Italo-American Speech in New Haven

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I dedicate this essay to all of the adults who allowed me as a child to sit at the table with them and listen to them talk.

New Haven, Connecticut during the period between the 1880s and the 1920s was the destination of large numbers of immigrants from Italy, mostly from the South and from the central East Coast, and their legacy remains unmistakable. That New Haven is home to an enormous Italian American community today is obvious to anyone who lives in or passes through the city. For instance, some consider the area a "pizza capital," and indeed anyone who drives around New Haven and the surrounding suburbs will count dozens of restaurants with the word "Apizza" (pronounced [aˈbits]) on a shingle outside each one. Glancing through the New Haven telephone book, one discovers that surnames such as Esposito, Carrano and Gambardella are as common as Smith or Jones may be in other parts of the country. Since the time of the first Italian mayor of New Haven, Mayor Celentano (1944-1953), every other mayor of the city has been of Italian descent. The current congresswoman for the New Haven area, Rosa DeLauro, a native of New Haven, is said to preside over the largest Italian American voting block in the nation.

At any rate, there is little need to belabor the point that New Haven possesses a large, sprawling and vibrant resident Italian American community.* What may not be as well known, however, is that a fascinating and unique dialect of American English is a major feature which characterizes that Italian community. Several linguists in the past have noted that in certain areas of the United States and other English speaking countries where large numbers of Italian immigrants chose to settle, the immigrants' non-Italian-born descendents tend to speak a variant of English distinguished by continued use of

* "New Haven" will be used to denote "Greater New Haven Area" for brevity's sake throughout the essay. "New Haven proper" will denote the actual city.

words and expressions from the diverse ancestral dialects. Each of these communities has a lexicon that varies according to the locations in Italy from which its immigrant settlers came. Additionally, each community differs with respect to the degree to which its speakers preserve original dialectal morphology and phonology. Nevertheless, the feature that is common to all of these Italian transplant communities is that primarily monolingual English speakers' use a fairly exclusive, esoteric English dialect with vocabulary based on regional Italian dialects. The linguists who have studied such communities have coined a variety of names for the special dialects spoken within them. This essay adopts the term "Italo-American" for the dialect in question. James Cascaito in the journal *American Speech* (1975) used this term in treating a similar community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.[2]

Few works exist that treat the dialect of an Italian-American community in detail. This essay, therefore, attempts to provide a thorough look at the community of Italo-American speakers of New Haven. The purposes of this essay are the following: 1) to inform the reader of the existence of a resident Italian American community in New Haven that now speaks a dialect of American English with a special lexicon based on words from dialects of Italian. 2) To describe the dialect in terms of its distinctive features. 3) To put forth hypotheses about why, out of all the dialectal items that the Italian immigrants once used on a daily basis, only a fraction—but a fraction that is fairly consistent among speakers—survives within the speech of their descendents. 4) To consider the number of dialectal items with which speakers of various age groups are familiar at the present time. 5) To discuss briefly the social implications of this

[2] Cascaito, James and Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, "An Italo-English Dialect," *American Speech* (Spring-

exclusive ethnically defined code of speech. The core of this essay is the section on New Haven's Italo-American vocabulary. The words and expressions discussed therein are drawn from a list of what I have determined to be commonly borrowed items. In this section I consider a large number lexical items individually, supplying anecdotes from Italian American culture to accompany some items in order to convey the sense of how alive they are within that culture. The section may seem exhaustive at points, but this is because one goal of this work is archival in nature: to present as much as possible a snapshot of New Haven's Italo-American dialect at the time of this writing. This goal necessitates discussion of a large portion of the dialects' vocabulary items.

Since it is useful for one to understand some background about a community whenever one studies an aspect of that community's culture, the first section of this essay briefs the reader on the history of the New Haven Italian community. This section is concerned with the following questions, which should provide the reader with grasp for the community's background: from which parts of Italy did most of the Italian immigrants who settled in New Haven come? Why did they leave Italy? Why did they choose to settle in New Haven? Where in New Haven did they live at first, and where do they live now? What is it about this community that renders it conducive to preserving a portion of its ancestral language generations after the last great influx of immigrants entering the area?

The general background having been established, section two begins to focus on the dialect known here as "Italo-American." The section begins by providing an overview of the New Haven Italo-American phonology. A brief explanation of the dialect's

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Summer 1975): 5-18.

grammatical features, such as the dialect's treatment of borrowed nouns, verbs and adjectives, follows. Then the lexicon is considered. The overall organization of the discussion on the lexicon is by parts of speech, starting with nouns and adjectives, continuing with verbs and ending with interjections. Again borrowing from Cascaito's work, I have chosen to divide the nouns and adjectives into categories to which the words seem to lend themselves fairly naturally. [3] Considering the words categorically can provide insight into which types of words the community in question has deemed important to maintain from the immigrant dialects. The section includes a discussion of lexical items, focusing on how many items have undergone a specialization of meaning in the process of being transferred from Neapolitan and other dialects into the jargon of an American community. For a number of items I provide etymological derivations, and I seek, in some cases, to draw correlations between Italian American culture and the items' preservation.

Section three considers in some detail my survey of Italo-American speakers. The results should give a sense for the correlation between speakers' ages and their familiarity with Italo-American words, based on a sample of New Haven's Italian Americans between the ages of 10 and 90. Such results can compliment the categorization of lexical items in the preceding section by showing which individual words appear to enjoy the most staying power across age groups, particularly among the youngest speakers, who will determine the future of the Italo-American speech code in New Haven. The results should also provide a basic sense for the rate at which Italo-

[3] Cascaito.

American is decaying in New Haven. From these results one may reasonably speculate about what the state of Italo-American will be at least in the near future.

Finally the conclusion summarizes the points that have been made throughout the essay. It also includes very brief discussion of the social nature of the Italian American community, which has allowed the Italo-American dialect to survive as long as it has in the city and surrounding area.

1. THE PEOPLE: AN HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

The overwhelming majority of the Italian immigrants who chose to settle in New Haven, like the majority of Italian immigrants who came to the United States in general, originated in Southern Italy (also known as the *mezzogiorno* region of Italy.) The simple reason for this fact is that Southern Italy, i.e. south of Rome, was in the late 19th century (and to some extent continues to be today) much more impoverished than Northern Italy. Backwards, out-dated agricultural techniques make the South, which is mostly a rural region, less than productive agriculturally. The absence of rapidly flowing water was a natural factor that caused the South to miss out on the industrialization that transformed the North's economy during the early 20th century, because the rapidly flowing rivers of the North enabled Northern factories to enjoy the use of hydroelectric power, and the South never had that advantage.[4] Illiteracy plagued the South, limiting Southerners' voting rights and their opportunities for jobs that require skill.

[4] Snowden, Frank, "The Southern Question." Lecture for the course History 280a in the Yale History Department, 28 September, 1998.

Many argue that the unification of the kingdoms on the Italian peninsula into the nation of Italy in 1861 was more of a curse than a blessing to much of the South. The very large city of Naples was one of the few urban centers in the South, and prior to unification it had been the capital of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, ruled by the Bourbons. Naples lost much of it prestige and privileges once it ceased to be the capital of a kingdom, and economic troubles have plagued the city to varying degrees ever since. More generally, however, a major negative side effect of the Italian *Risorgimento* on the South was an end to collective land rights, which had, since Roman times, permitted peasants to use open land for hunting, grazing, and gathering of fruits, nuts and wood, among other things. The newly formed liberal Italian State fostered private ownership of this common land, to the detriment of peasants but to the benefit of an emerging middle class.[5] Dissatisfaction with the new Italian State precipitated during the 1860s a decade of briggandage and lawlessness that forced the Italian military to occupy much of the South and amplified the already common belief among Northerners that the Southerners were a separate and inferior race of humans.[6] This racist viewpoint colored national government policies affecting the South; Italy tended to treat the South as a colonial appendage and tax Southerners mostly for the benefit of the more industrial and prosperous North.[7]

The factors mentioned above and a host of other factors accounted for the South's poverty, and poverty accounted for some horrendous living conditions among residents of the *mezzogiorno*. Housing conditions were substandard with much overcrowding and often squalor. Historian Martin Clark describes these conditions thus: "one room without

[5] Clark, Martin. *Modern Italy: 1871-1995*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Longman, 1996), p.15.
[6] Clark, p.69-70.
[7] Snowden.

light was shared by humans and animals, and this was true of the more prosperous peasants; the poor ones had no animals with which to share their houses."[8] The awful housing conditions combined with malnutrition created a fertile environment for disease. Malaria was rampant, causing between 20 and 30% of the deaths in the countryside of the *mezzogiorno.* Outbreaks of cholera were not uncommon, with major epidemics scourging the city of Naples at intervals during the 1880s. [9]

During this bleak period of the late 19th Century, relatively cheap overseas travel became an option for Italians, and opportunities to work abroad offered an escape from the dire poverty of Southern Italy. Some popular foreign destinations for the Southern Italian emigrants were Northeastern American cities, which were rapidly expanding and industrializing, and therefore in need of massive amounts of cheap labor. At first Italian men would go to the New World to earn some money. They would send their pay home to their families in Italy as remittance or would return to their families after some time, having earned a small fortune for themselves in America. In a Southern Italian village, whenever one resident would return from abroad having been successful there, other men from the same village would travel to the same foreign destination. This process has been called "chain migration." Chain migration accounts for the large numbers of Italian immigrants from the same towns settling in the same places in America and elsewhere.[10]

Although New Haven was settled by immigrants from various Southern regions of Italy, including Sicily, Calabria, Abruzzi, Apulia, as well as from the more Northern region of Le Marche, the largest block of immigrants came from the region of Campania.

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[8] Clark, p.20.
[9] Clark, p.21, 7.

This is largely the result of chain migration. A case in point is the small fishing village in Campania known as Amalfi, which is a particularly common place of origin for New Haven Italian. The Sargent Company, a New Haven hardware manufacturer, actively recruited laborers from Amalfi to work in its shops, and this recruitment is largely responsible for the steady stream of Amalfitani emigrants who chose New Haven as a place to settle.[11] Similar scenarios were responsible for the large numbers of immigrants who entered New Haven from other towns within Campania, such as the region's capital city of Naples. The popularity of Amalfi and Naples is striking and also crucial for understanding the heavy influence of Neapolitan dialect on New Haven's Italo-American.

Before too long, immigrants from Italy ceased to be only transient men, and whole families began to settle in New Haven, many to remain indefinitely. A couple of decades witnessed an impressive influx of Italian immigrants: in 1884 about 1500 Italian immigrants were residing in New Haven, which had a total population of roughly 63,000. By 1890 that number had grown to 2,330 Italians (with 454 American-born children), and by 1900 it had reached 7,780 (with over 2500 American-born). The Italian population growth continued steadily until the 1920s when nation immigration laws curbed the inflow of unskilled masses from abroad. By 1930, 65% of New Haven's Italian community was American-born. [12] The great immigration period having ended, the assimilation and Americanization processes among New Havens' large Italian community would begin to accelerate.

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[10] Miller, Morty. "New Haven: The Italian Community." (essay, Yale University, History Department, 1969) p.16-22.
[11] *Sisters: New Haven Preserves its Old World Heritage.* prod. and dir. Carol Lionetti, Leodan Productions, 1996, videocassette.
[12] Miller, p.23-26, 52.

Within New Haven, the Wooster Square neighborhood would quickly become a concentrated and fairly "exclusive" Italian neighborhood. Parts of the city's Hill Section would also be settled by Italians as well as Fair Haven.[13] The three neighborhoods mentioned above remained epicenters of the Italian community until at least the 1950s. After that time, the Wooster Square section physically shrank as parts of it were demolished for the construction of the highway and for other "urban renewal" projects. In the other neighborhoods, increasing numbers of Italian Americans fled to neighboring suburbs in search of single family homes and more space, as they became more assimilated and prosperous. Today, what remains of the Wooster Square neighborhood is the token epicenter of the Italian community in New Haven and is still largely populated by Italians. The Italian community in the Hill Section has been drastically reduced (although St. Anthony parish remains solidly Italian), and the community has declined significantly in several parts of Fair Haven as well. The Morris Cove and Annex sections of the city have been built up since the earlier part of the 20th Century, and the two neighborhoods are like suburbs within the city limits in terms of lower density of housing and a variety of factors. These areas and Wooster Square are probably the neighborhoods of New Haven most heavily populated by Italian Americans today.

Although a large number of Italian Americans have moved to the suburbs since the ~~since the~~ 1950s, the community has resisted the tendency to scatter over distances. The Italian American tendency to centralize around the homes of parents and grandparents and other family members has enabled the Italian community to remain intact despite the general relocation from relatively dense urban blocks to more spacious

[13] Miller, p.50-58.

neighborhoods of the city and to suburbs. This type of cohesion has played an essential role in the preservation of a special Italo-American speech code to which we now turn.

2. THE ITALO-AMERICAN

I have gathered the material on the dialect about to be discussed through the following means: a life-time of personal observations, which my membership in the New Haven Italian American community has enabled me to make; a survey, which I prepared to test word recognition among speakers of various ages and education levels, and in which speakers were given the opportunity to list dialectal words of their own (the survey will be discussed in greater detail further below); interviews with native speakers of local dialects throughout the region of Campania in Italy; and finally dictionaries, some etymological, of Neapolitan-, Basilicatese-, and Sicilian-Italian. In light of the data that I have gathered I conclude that 1) the borrowed dialectal items in the speech of New Haven Italians are almost exclusively of Campano origin—the 'standard' for which is traditionally held to be Neapolitan. [14] 2) Pronunciation of dialectal items varies considerably from speaker to speaker throughout New Haven. The variations reflect degrees of Anglicization, of imperfect learning and of preservation of certain local nuances hearkening back to specific regions in Italy. 3) The lexicon of New Haven's Italian Americans is fairly uniform and consistent overall. 4) The lexicon is currently dynamic in one direction, that is to say that dialectal items are vanishing over time, but no

[14] "Campano" here means "related to dialects spoken in the region of Campania." Italo-American words known in New Haven derive from various local dialects spoken in the Campania region and in other regions of Italy. For simplicity's sake throughout this essay, I will refer to divers dialects spoken throughout Campania collectively as "Neapolitan."

new items are entering the community's speech from the Italian dialects—although the existing items in the community's speech have evolved over time and continue to do so.

Now let us turn to the dialect itself.

I/ PHONOLOGY

What will strike most readers initially is the discrepancy between the orthographic notation of the dialectal items and the given Italo-American pronunciation that follows each item. The spellings of borrowed words have been obtained chiefly from dictionaries of Neapolitan and of other dialects. As for pronunciation, I have provided for each item one possible choice, and I have judged those choices to be quite popular ones among speakers whose first language is English, and who have learned the dialectal items not from immigrants themselves but from children of immigrants. Let there be no confusion: as mentioned above, speakers produce a wide range of possible pronunciations; how particular items are pronounced is mostly a matter of ideolect. Some speakers, especially those who have had personal contact and relationships with Italian immigrants, i.e. older speakers, attempt to imitate as accurately as possible the pronunciations which their immigrant sources used. This is significant because, although I propose that a "leveling" of various local dialects into one predominant one has taken place in New Haven, some vestiges of local flavor endure in this manner. On the other hand, mishearing of words, failure to separate syllables correctly, and general interference from American English largely determine the ideolects of many other speakers.

Much more challenging than one might expect is the task of determining to what degree Italo-American has preserved the phonology of the immigrant dialect speakers and

to what degree it has modified that phonology. Directly below I provide a series of sound rules to explain the discrepancies between the pronunciations produced by American speakers in their ideolects and those produced by native speakers of Neapolitan in Italy, or those suggested by Neapolitan dictionaries. At least two flaws of such a method, of course, are immediately apparent: 1) Neapolitan may be a somewhat (although not terribly) arbitrary selection of a standard for comparison, and 2) Neapolitan itself has undergone changes such as 'Italianization' over the course of the 20th century and may not sound today as it sounded at the time when thousands of Neapolitan speakers flooded into New Haven. To proceed, however, we must hold the assumptions that Italo-American in today's New Haven hails predominantly from the Neapolitan spoken in Campania's capital city of Naples, and that the "straight" Neapolitan dialect spoken today in Campania bears significant resemblance to an earlier form.

Consonants:

i) Interference with American English

It is indeed possible to consider certain sound changes to reflect innovations that occurred in the New World. Such major changes are the collapsing of Neapolitan double consonants into Italo-American single consonants and the replacement of trilled [r] with the American approximate [ɹ].

Reduction of consonant length

While geminates remain salient in Neapolitan, as in most dialects spoken throughout all of Italy, they seem to have fallen out of Italo-American completely. The double consonants in a large number of Neapolitan words, such as *baccalà, bucchinòtto, zuffrìto* and *mammalùcco*, to name only a few, are pronounced as single consonants in their corresponding Italo-American equivalents. The motivation behind this change seems clear: reduplication of consonants is neither contrastive nor salient in the English language as it is in Italian dialects. Therefore those who grow up speaking English do not learn to pay much attention to the length of consonants, and that feature quickly disappears.

Rotacization

Always a clear mark of Anglicization is the appearance of the uniquely English [ɹ] in words of foreign origin. Many Italo-American speakers employ that consonant in certain borrowed words. Some common examples are [fɹəˈzeɹəl], *'fresèlla'*, [bɹaˈʒuəl], *'brasciòla'*, and [ɹəˈguət], *'ricotta'*. Surprisingly, however, the use of American [ɹ] in New Haven Italo-American is extremely rare and only occurs in limited examples such as these, which are common food items with which any citizen of the New Haven area, regardless of ethnicity, might be familiar. Further below we shall see how Italo-American more commonly treats Neapolitan trilled [r].

ii) New World innovations or Old World preservations

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ii) New World innovations or Old World preservations

Whereas the two changes mentioned above are clear cut New World innovations, the following changes may either have occurred among Italo-American speakers, or they may reflect tendencies already present among native Neapolitan speakers, merely amplified by Italian Americans. Such tendencies are: 1) the ambiguity between voiced and unvoiced stops, spirants and africates [p, b, t, d, k, g, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ], 2) the [b-/v-] and [v/w] distinctions, 3) the productive apocopation of final vowels, either replacing them with nothing or with aspiration, 4) the transformation of [o] and [e] into the respective diphthongs [oʊ] and [ei], 5) the nasalization of [ɛ] into [ɛ̃] in certain ideolects.

Voicing ambiguity

original dialects. This is because double [p] in the original dialects always shows up as single, voiceless, aspirated [p] in Italo-American: [ma'p^{h}in], *'mappìna'*, [kup^{h}ə'litʃ], *'cuppulìcchio'*, [a'zup^{h}], *'a zuppa'*.

Initial [p] is nearly always voiceless and aspirated, as in English: [p^{h}a'stin], *'pastìna'*, and [p^{h}i'tse̯ə̯l], *'pizzella'*. Only in rare cases can an initial voiced [p] be heard: many pronounce the word *putana* with a voiced /p/, [bu'tan], but that is primarily due to the fact that the word is frequently borrowed along with its definite article as the single the unit *'a putàna,'* and so the [p] in that word is actually not initial for some speakers. In even rarer cases, the ideolects of certain speakers may lead them to voice initial [p] habitually and produce items such as ['bastəvazul], *'past'e fasule'*. This is not terribly common, however. After the sibilant [ʃ], [p] is voiceless but unaspirated: [aʃ'pɛt], *'aspètta'*.

--[t]>[d] is quite productive intervocalically. Ex. ['adʒɪdə], *'àceto'*. Italo-American words derived from Neapolitan past participles supply ample instances of this: the participle endings are *–ato/-ata* (both pronounced [-'atə]), but they are understood in Italo-American as [-ad], as in the adjectives [ʃkustu'mad], *'scostumàto'*, and [stu'nad], *'stunàto'*. The voicing of intervocalic single [t] is almost entirely consistent for most speakers. Once again the word *putàna* is a single common exception, often pronounced [bu'tan].

Italo-American in New Haven possesses few words beginning with [t], but those that exist tend to be inconsistent with respect to voicing: [taˈdal], *'taràllo'* but [daranˈdɛl], *'tarantèlla.'* Note that [t] always retains its voicelessness after the sibilant, as in the last two examples.

--[k] behaves almost exactly like [p]. Intervocalically, [k] is always voiced: [magiˈnɛtʰ], *'machinètta'*, and [maniˈguətʰ], *'manicòtti'*. The Italo-American words containing the intervocalic, unvoiced [k] sound derive from words with the double consonant in the Italian dialects: [bukiˈnuət], *'bucchinòtto'* and [bakaˈla], *'baccalà'*. Initially, [k] usually remains unvoiced and aspirated: [kʰalaˈmad], *'calamàre'* and [kʰuˈguts], *'cucòzza'*. Depending upon the speaker, exceptions to this rule can occur, particularly when a [u] follows the initial [k] sound. A common example is *cummàra* or *cumpàre*, which a number of speakers pronounce [guˈmad] and [gumˈbad] respectively. When following the sibilant [ʃ], [k] always remains unvoiced and unaspirated: [ʃkaˈduəl], *'scaròla'* and [ʃkumbaˈdi], *'scumparì'*.

--[f]: Like the stops just mentioned, the spirant [f] tends to remain unvoiced initially: [fɪəˈzerʲəl], *'fresèlla'* and [fəˈnukʲ], *'fenùchhio'*; but it becomes voiced intervocalically: [moɹteɪˈvam], *'muort'e famma'*. Unvoiced intervocalic [f] corresponds to double [f] in Neapolitan: [suˈfritʰ], *'zuffrìtto'*. After a sibilant, [f] remains unvoiced: [sfaˈtʃim], *'sfaccìmma'*.

--[s], [ʃ], [tʃ]: These two spirants and an africate are the remaining characters in the voicing ambiguity series. [s], [ʃ], and [tʃ] remain unvoiced initially: [saŋgwiˈnatʃ], *'sanguinàccio'*, [ʃuˈdiʲəl], *'sciurìllo'*, [ˈtʃidʒɪdə], *'cìcere'*. Intervocalically they tend to become voiced: [æ̃nəeˈzɛt], *'anisètta'*, [bɪaˈʒɔəl], *'brasciòla,'* [ˈadʒɪdə], *'àceto'*. Italo-American maintains the Southern Italian tendency to palatalize [s]>[ʃ] before [k], [p] and sometimes [f]: [ʃkumbaˈdi], *'scumparì'*, [ʃpaˈkoun], *'spaccòne'* and [ʃfijəˈdɛl], *'sfoiatèlla'*. Exception: [ˈskutʃ], *scùccia-*.

Betacismo

--[b] and [v] are so commonly interchangeable and ambiguous in Italian dialects that Italian Linguists have coined a term for the ambiguity: *betacismo*.[16] An example of how Italo-American speakers in New Haven have preserved this ambiguity is the choice of two ideolectal pronunciations of the word *vasenicòla*: [bazɛniˈguəl] and [vazɛniˈguəl].

As in many languages of the world, Southern Italian dialects sometimes confuse [v] and [w], and current Italo-American reflects this as well: [waˈʒiəl], *'vascìle'* and [woʊˈli], *'vulìo'*.

--[r]>[d]: The last major consonant change to mention between Neapolitan and New Haven's Italo American is the transformation of trilled [r] into a distinct [d] consonant. Already mentioned above are some examples of trilled [r] transformed into the approximant [ɹ], but [r]>[d] is far more productive in Italo-American. Modified [r] turns

up intervocalically and 'finally,' where final vowels have been lost: [ʃuˈdiəʲəl], *'sciurìllo'*, [mutsaˈdɛl], *'muzzarèlla'*, [madiˈnad], *'marinàra'*. Dialect speakers probably pronounced the [r] in those cases as a flap, [ɾ], but American children hearing the words perceived the flaps as true voiced dental stops and exaggerated them into [d]. In some speakers' ideolects, the [r] really is pronounced [ɾ] and not [d]. Those with lesser familiarity with the dialects and ignorant of the words' orthography tend to opt for the latter. Another possible origin for this [r]/[d] confusion, however, may be within the Neapolitan itself. German linguist Rohlfs writes: "many areas in the region of Campania are characterized by the rotacization *d>r*...ex. *maronna* for '*madonna.*'" (Rohlfs 1966, § 153)[17]. Although Italian Americans tend to transform *r>d*, such a tendency may simply reflect an ambiguity already present in the ancestral languages. Perhaps the insertion of a [d] for an [r] may even have been a hypercorrection on the part of the immigrants.

--While some Italian Americans diligently preserve initial [ts] in their pronunciation, many tend to reduce the consonant cluster either to an [s] or a [z]. Therefore the following forms coexist: [ˈtsɛɪpələ], [ˈzɛɪpələ] for *'zèppola'*; [tsupədɪˈbɛɪʒ], [supədɪˈbɛɪʒ] for *'zuppa di pèsce'*; [tsuˈfritʰ], [suˈfritʰ] for *'zuffrìtto'*. Those who choose to reduce the consonant cluster probably do so because the cluster is fairly marked in initial position in English.

[16] Radtke, p. 64.
[17] Radtke, p.69, my translation.

Vowels

Apocopy

--One of the most common things that Italo-American does with certain original dialectal vowels is to eliminate them. The loss of final vowels is rampant across Italo-American. Neapolitan, standard Italian and other Italian dialects have the characteristic feature that nearly all words end in vowels. Standard Italian words end in distinct vowels, usually –a or –o, because those vowels are morphemes that encode gender and number. In Neapolitan gender and number are salient features, but Neapolitan allows metaphony, that is the mutation of word-internal vowels to encode grammatical distinctions. Metaphony in Neapolitan permits the consistent reduction of final to schwas, [ə].

In English, the gender distinction is not grammatically salient at all, and the number distinction is encoded in the productive –s ending. Therefore, the final vowels of borrowed words are certainly not necessary. English words also do not typically end in [ə]. Hence the common apocopy of final vowels throughout Italo-American.

Stress determines whether final neutralized Neapolitan vowels will be apocopated or maintained in Italo-American. Apocopy in Italo-American words occurs whenever the stress once fell upon the penultimate syllable in Neapolitan; the final vowel having disappeared, the penultimate syllable becomes the ultimate syllable. Whenever stress falls on earlier syllables than the penultimate, the final vowel remains. Compare the following examples: [maˈpʰin], *'mappìna'*, [ʃkaˈduəl], *'scaròla'*,

[stuˈnad], *'stunàto'*, with [ˈtʃidʒɪdə], *'cìcere'*, [ˈtseɪpələ], *'zèppola'*, [aˈɾeɪgɪdə], *'arècata'*. The latter three all retain their final vowels. The final reduced vowel probably seemed so short when immediately following a stressed syllable that it became imperceptible to the ears of Italian American children learning English as their mother tongue.

Wherever an apocopated final vowel once followed a single [t], that [t] has come to be pronounced as a [d]. Wherever the vowel followed a double [t], however, two possibilities for pronunciation exist. For some American speakers the transformation has progressed from -[t:]/V > -[t]/0 > [ʔ]. These speakers end words that once ended with two /t/'s and a vowel with a glottal stop. This is consistent with much 'lazy and careless' American speech in which speakers 'swallow' their final /t/'s. An example is this pronunciation of *bucchinòtto,* [bukiˈnuəʔ]. Italian Americans end many other words described above, however, with a single [t] followed by a hefty dose of aspiration where the final vowel once stood: [ˈmoɹtʰ], *'muorto'*, [aˈʃpɛtʰ], *'aspètta'* This pattern of replacing a final vowel with aspiration is not necessarily an American innovation; it is common also in actual Southern Italian dialects: "the vowels at the ends of words tend to disappear, or else they are manifested as weak 'aspirations.'"[18]

Diphthong formation

[18] Radtke, p.63, my translation.

-- Most dialects of the English language in diverse localities distinguish themselves from neighboring Indo-European languages by their paucity of pure vowels and their rich array of diphthongs. Likewise Neapolitan and other Southern Italian dialects differ from standard Italian by inserting diphthongs into places where pure vowels occur in standard Italian cognates. Radtke describes these progressions in many dialects of Campania with examples such as [e] > [eɪ] and [o] > [oʊ][19] Italian Americans, particularly the more "Americanized," i.e. further removed from immigrant speakers, tend to pronounce borrowed items with diphthongs instead of pure vowels. Since both Neapolitan and English bear a strong tendency to form diphthongs, a question arises about whether the Italo-American current pronunciation reflects a preservation of local dialectal diphthongs or an acquiescence to local American English phonology. My assumption in this essay is that the typical American English diphthongs in Italo-American words generally reflect an interference with American English pronunciation. Although some diphthongs may actually have existed in the ideolects of immigrant speakers, it is too difficult to tell which of the current diphthongs are original. For completeness, here are some examples of Italo-American diphthongs: [a ˈʃpeɪz], *'a spesa'*, [kjakjədeɪs], *'chiacchierèssa'*, [pʰiˈɲoʊl], *'pignùolo'*, [kaˈvoʊn], *'cavòne'*.

Italo-American in New Haven nearly always transforms open [ɔ] into the diphthong [uə]: [ˈmuəs], *mosso,* [ˈkjuəkʰ], *chiòcca* and [kabəˈduəst], *capatuòsto*. Capitulation to English phonology is the most likely explanation for this development. The dialect of American English typically spoken by residents of the

[19] Radtke, p.55.

Connecticut Shoreline, particularly by those of the working class, lacks open [ɔ] and consistently replaces it with [uə]. Connecticut Shoreline pronunciations of 'talk', [ˈtʰuək] 'ball', [ˈbuəl], and 'dog', [ˈduəg], exemplify this.

Other vowel permutations

-- [o], [u], [u:o]; [ɛ],[ɛ̃]. Italo-American pronunciation possibilities reflect several other regional and ideolectal permutations that exist in Neapolitan. Neapolitan dictionaries list the following entries with the following spellings: *pignùolo, cannùolo, mùorto.* The spellings suggest a typical Neapolitan pronunciation consisting of a long [u] and a short [o], together transcribed as [u:o]. Not all speakers throughout the region of Campania, however, pronounce the listed words with such a diphthong. In fact, in Campania there exists a reasonable flexibility between the diphthong [u:o] and the vowels [o] and [u]. Few Italian Americans in New Haven produce that diphthong, probably because it is so marked as foreign in American English. The speakers instead 'simplify' the diphthong into one of its component vowels, [o] or [u]. As in Southern Italian dialects, Italo-American permits some flexibility in terms of which vowel to choose. Most speakers tend to use pronounce *pignùolo* as [pʰiˈɲoʊl] but *cannùolo* as [kaˈnul], but the converse for each is entirely possible for other speakers.

Another pair of permutations that exists both in Campania and in New Haven is the pure and nasalized [ɛ]. Radtke mentions the nasalization that some speakers in

Neapolitan apply to vowels in stressed syllables, particularly before an apocopated vowel.[20] Two examples of that in Italo-American are the variants [meza'vɛ̃m], *mezafèmmina* and [mə'nɛ̃st], *menèsta*. These forms exist in complimentary distribution with the unnasalized forms [meza'vɛm] and [mə'nɛst].

There are other phonological features of Italo-American that render it either similar to or distinct from Neapolitan, but these are what I have found to be the most significant features. Having seen some generally how New Haven Italian Americans have come to pronounce words borrowed from Neapolitan and from other dialects, we now turn to the ways in which they use these words grammatically.

II/ GRAMMAR

One must remember that Italo-American is a dialect of American English. As far as the Italian American speakers are concerned, the words of Italo-American are English words. For some speakers, especially those who are young and/or not well educated, it is difficult at times to distinguish some of the most commonly used Italo-American words from true, lexicalized English words.

Italo-American words, therefore, behave like English words morphologically. Nouns, the category to which the overwhelming majority of Italo-American vocabulary items belong, become plural by taking the English -s ending. English definite and

[20] Radtke, p. 59.

indefinite articles precede Italo-American nouns.* Ex.: "one *fresella* [fɪəˈzeɹˈəl], two *fresellas* [fɪəˈzeɹˈəlz].

Italo-American has not maintained nearly as many Neapolitan verbs as it has nouns, and they don't all behave the same way. Only a few of them can actually be conjugated, the rest are either used only as imperatives or as infinitives. One of the conjugating verbs, to *scumparì* [ʃkumbaˈdi̤],** takes the Neapolitan infinitival form to be its stem, and English morphemes attach themselves to the infinitive; all verb forms that must be produced periphrastically in English are so produced with this Neapolitan verb. The stem is used by itself following modal verbs and other auxiliaries: one "can, may, will *scumparì',* but one "does not want *to scumparì."* The stem also stands alone while conjugated in the present tense, except in the third person singular when it takes the –s ending: "I *scumparì,* you *scumparì,* he *scumparìs* [ʃkumbaˈdiz]." The remaining verb essential form is *scumparied.* The present participle *scumparying* seems possible although quite awkward.

Two other conjugating verbs probably derive from the Neapolitan verbs *scuccià* and *schivà.* Unlike the example above, the Neapolitan infinitive form is not maintained as a stem in Italo-American for these words, but rather the Italo-American stems are identical to the Neapolitan stems, namely *schiv-* and *scucc-*, pronounced

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* A number of Italo-American nouns are actually Neapolitan nouns with the Neapolitan articles, mostly definite, affixed. Some examples are *apizza, a spesa, a còtena, a zuppa, o zì, nu cazzo.* It is unclear why these particular words have been borrowed along with their articles as one unit, but this happens consistently. The Italo-American speakers nearly always fail to realize that the first syllable of each of these items is actually an article, and they thus treat these items as single words and place English articles before them: Exs. "Let's go out for an *apizza* tonight." "Try some *a còtena."* "Her husband acts like a *nu cazz'."*

** *Scumparì* is the infinitival form in Neapolitan.

[ˈʃkiv] and [ˈskutʃ] respectively. Since the pronunciation of these verbs is not transparent if they are written with English morphology tacked onto Neapolitan stems, I shall facilitate the reading of these by spelling their stems *shkeeve* and *skooch* here. The possible forms of these verbs aside from the root forms are *shkeeves, skooches; shkeeved, skooched; shkeeving, skooching.*

Other verbs have been borrowed in such a way that they may only be used as infinitives or as imperatives. Those that are used as infinitives are borrowed as infinitives from Neapolitan, and they require the English infinitival marker "to" despite the infinitival marking which they already possess from Neapolitan. For instance, one can want something "to *mangià* [manˈdʒa]", but a tensed form such as *"he *mangias*" is unacceptable. A number of other verbs in Italo-American lingo cannot be conjugated but are used as formulaic commands, practically interjections. An example is *aspett'* [aˈʃpɛtʰ], which functions a command but can never be conjugated as *"he *aspett's."*

Italo-American adjectives, being English adjectives, do not express number or gender morphologically but always remain the same. One or more men or women can be *'musciato** [muˈʃad] or *stunàto* [stuˈnad], for example.

No true adverbs appear to exist in the vocabulary. The rest of the items in the inventory of Italo-American vocabulary are interjections or formulaic phrases that punctuate English sentences the way such particles would in standard English. Exs.: "He had the nerve to disrespect his parents like that after all they've done for him? *Azzò* [aːˈtsoʊː]!"

Having established some rules of pronunciation and of grammar for the Italo-American speech of New Haven, let us now turn to what is perhaps the most fascinating part about Italo-American jargon, then meanings of its words.

III/ LEXICON

The immigrants were once monolingual in their native dialects and spoke them fluently and constantly among themselves in their homes, in some cases on the job, and certainly within their ethnic enclaves. The second generation, i.e. the first American-born, tended to speak English in most situations, especially from the age of school forward, while often continuing to speak the dialects with parents and with other elders of the community. Although members of the second generation often became most proficient in English, they tended to maintain within their English speech certain words and expressions from their parents' dialects. They would use the special vocabulary among themselves, mostly to establish linguistically the boundaries of their ethnic in-group. Subsequent generations then learned not Neapolitan dialect but rather the selected vocabulary items that their elders had bothered to maintain within their English speech. What is fascinating is that their elders tended to maintain words and expressions in a systematic way, not maintaining just any group of words from the dialects but rather a fairly consistent canon of vocabulary items across the community. Having observed the vocabulary of Italo-American, I have found that a large number of lexical items tend to fall into certain categories, and I have decided to consider the items categorically here. I divide the Viewing the items categorically may reveal some semblance of logic that

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* The apostrophe represents the clipping of the initial syllable in the Neapolitan word *ammusciàto* to form

governed which words the Italian community came to maintain from the immigrant dialects. It seems likely that the community's culture has played a role in determining which items have been maintained.

I have organized the section in the following way: first I consider nouns and some adjectives which I have found to fall under the rubrics of "food items," "household/kitchen items," and "fuss/fret words." Another segment on nouns and adjectives that function as "titles and epithets" follows.[21] This segment is somewhat lengthier than the preceding ones because the words within it have mostly undergone specializations of meaning and/or reveal some features of Italian American culture, and therefore I found them worthy of some attention. After the noun section I consider some verbs and interjections.

Nouns, adjectives

Food items

By far the most numerous group of vocabulary words in the Italo-American lexicon is that of food names. Since nearly all of the foods are Southern Italian specialties, they would not be called by any other name except the original Southern Italian names. The types of foods include pasta dishes, types of meat or fish, some vegetables and herbs, sweets and nuts. Many of the foods are traditionally associated with certain holidays in Southern Italian culture. It is also important to note that Italians

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this Italo-American adjective.

of New Haven often opt for more or less Neapolitan sounding pronunciations of food items that may be well known to most of the American population with Americanized pronunciations.

One should note that New Haveners tend to use the word 'macaroni' to denote any type of pasta rather than troubling themselves with distinctions between *'zitti'* and *'penne'*, etc. On the other hand, they nearly always refer to dishes such as *'spaghetti,'* *'ravioli,'* *'cavatìelles'* [kavəˈdiʲəlz] and *pastìna* [pʰaˈstin] by their individual names. The set called 'macaroni' could, however, conceivably encompass all of those subsets for many in New Haven. Consistent with the productive practice of attaching English morphology to words of Italian, some Italian families can be heard double-marking pasta-words for the plural, thus producing forms such as 'macaronies', and 'raviolies', and the already mentioned 'cavatìelles.' The speakers tend to maintain the Neapolitan names for various combination pasta dishes such as *past'e fasùlo* [pʰastəvaˈzul], meaning 'pasta and beans', *past' e pisìelli* [pastəpɪˈziʲəl], meaning 'pasta and peas', and *past'e cìcere* [pastəˈtʃidʒɪdə], meaning 'pasta and garbanzo beans.'

A large proportion of Italian families in the New Haven area still takes pride in home-made tomato sauce prepared at the very least once a week, often for the large Sunday afternoon meal with family. The sauce may consist only of tomatoes, in which case it is called *marinàra* [madiˈnad]. Frequently, however, the New Haven Italians prefer a meat sauce. Meat sauces consist almost always of home-made meat balls

[21] I base this organization loosely on Cascaito's study of Italo-American in Pittsburg. Cascaito discussed that community's lexicon in terms of categories defined as "cuisine, dress/personal appearance, and character words."

(prepared with chopped meat, Italian bread soaked in water, parsley, garlic and other seasonings), maybe pieces of pork—such as spare ribs—and sweet or hot Italian sausage. Another traditionally southern Italian piece of meat that is a part of many meat sauces is *brasciòla* [bɹaˈʒuəl]. *Brasciòla* is a flat, coiled up piece of meat, usually beef, heavily seasoned with garlic and parsley and possibly including other additives such as pine nuts. The rolled up *brasciòla* is tied closed with a piece of household string while it cooks within the tomato sauce. When removed from the sauce, the string is cut before the meat is served. The household string has countless uses around the home, but its function described above is so popular, that New Haven Italians commonly refer to it as '*brasciòla* string.' On relatively rare occasions, some Italians may lay aside their concerns over cholesterol and partake of a piece of pig skin that looks like pure fat within their sauce. The skin is known as *a còtena* [aˈgoʊdmə]. Additionally, New Haven Italians also love to prepare sauce with fish from time to time, adding lobster tails, clams, sardines called *alisci* [aˈliʒ], squid called *calamàre* [kalaˈmad] and various other sea foods.

Certain vegetables continue to be called by their Neapolitan names. A favorite green is 'escarole', which the Italians call *scaròla* [ʃkaˈduəl]. Frequently the *scaròla* is cooked with some meat in a soup known as *menèsta* [məˈnɛst]. The following vegetables have Neapolitan names which have been maintained in Italo-American: zucchini, called *cucòzza* [kuˈguts], cucumber, called *cetrùlo* [ʃəˈdrul], and eggplant, called *mulignàna* [mulɪˈɲam]*. These dialectal words have other figurative senses in addition to their literal

* I cannot account for the shift in the final consonant from [n] in Neapolitan to [m] in Italo-American, but it should be noted.

denotations of vegetables, as we shall see below, and the duplicity of meaning may possibly contribute to the words' longevity in Italo-American. Words with two meanings may be more highly motivated to endure than words with only one sense.

On special days of the year, many Italians of New Haven continue to enjoy traditional Southern Italian foods long associated with the occasions. At the Christmas Eve meal, Italians traditionally consume seafood almost exclusively. Popular dishes are the fish sauces mentioned above, a dried, white fish known as *baccalà* [bakaˈla] and other fruits of the sea—maybe even a whole smorgasbord of seafood combined in one *zuppa di pèsce* [supədɪˈbeɪʒ]. So popular is the seafood meal on Christmas Eve that local supermarkets during the week before Christmas herd bustling customers into lines to cash registers set up exclusively for those who wish to buy fish (the majority of the customers); trailer trucks selling fish wholesale park outside of other markets to sell to the holiday shoppers. For dessert at Christmas time, Italians make a host of traditional cookies, one of the most common being the *anginètta* [ændʒɪˈnɛt]. From Basilicata comes the name of this cookie with ground lemon and orange rind in its dough and covered with white, sugary anise or lemon-flavored frosting. March 19th is the feast of San Giuseppe (St. Joseph). Lines extend out to the sidewalks in front of Italian bakeries as customers eagerly seek the pastry known as a *zèppola* [ˈzɛɪpələ]. At Easter time, many Italian families of New Haven continue the Southern Italian tradition of making of Easter pies (known as *pastiere* in Campania). Some of the most common are Italian cream pie, rice pie, *apizza chièna* [abitsaˈgeɪn], lit. meaning a 'full pie'—which is also known as 'ham pie' and contains diced pieces of ham, pepperoni and other meats,

different types of cheese and eggs—and *apizz'e gran* [abitsɛɪˈgran], lit. 'grain pie'—a pie with a creamy filling based on wheat seeds.

Other dialectal food words remain in use for special Southern Italian delicacies that some New Haven Italians continue to prepare. A long standing Italian tradition is to maintain vegetable gardens outside the house, even when available space is minimal, as it is on relatively dense urban blocks. Those who grow zucchini, yellow squash, pumpkins or anything within that family of flora frequently pick the blossoms of those plants early in the morning while the blossoms are open and then fry the blossoms in a batter. The 'squash flowers' are known as *sciurìllis* [ʃuˈdilz]. At several Italian *feste,* one can still obtain a meal made of cow's organs known as *zuffritto* [suˈfrit^{h}]. Some hearty old timers may continue to prepare a Neapolitan specialty called *sanguinàccio* [saŋgwiˈnatʃ], a dessert based on pig's blood. The list of Neapolitan food names still known to the Italians of New Haven goes on and on.

Household/Kitchen items: (mothers' and children's words)

The kitchen is the most important room in the Italian house, which is the family's temple. The home and kitchen are traditionally the domain of women, who transmit traditional Italian values and dialectal vocabulary to children. A group of words in the Italo-American vocabulary of New Haven can possibly attribute their place in Italo-American today to that process.

Several items that are frequently referred to using Italo-American words are found in the Italian kitchen. The rag used to dry dishes is typically called a *mappìna* [maˈpʰin]. The Italian family may like to enjoy strong, black Italian espresso coffee prepared in a special coffee pot known as a *machinètta* [magiˈnɛtʰ]. The coffee produced in the *machinètta* is typically drunk with a piece of lemon skin floating inside it or sweetened, not with sugar, but with a liqueur. A popular liqueur employed in this way is *anisètta* [ænɪˈzɛt], which bears the anise flavor. An old trusty basin can serve multiple purposes, from washing dishes to bathing little babies. Such a basin is affectionately referred to by some, especially among the older generations, as a *vascìle* [waˈʒiʲəl]. What can be more Italian than pasta? Maybe the colander used to strain the scalding water from the pasta. Many old-time Italians of New Haven call that colander a *scalapasta* [ʃkalaˈbast]. Some of those same old folks like to refer to the ladle used for scooping tomato sauce or soup as a *cupìno* [kuˈpʰin].

The following three words do not necessarily bear a connection with the kitchen, but they tend to be words taught to small children. One of them the word is "coolie." Adults warn naughty children that they must behave, or else they'll be spanked on their "coolies." "Coolie" is New Haven's Italo-American euphemism for 'buttocks,' used almost solely with small children. The exact origin of "coolie" is unclear, but it seems most plausible that it is a diminutive of the rather unsavory Neapolitan term for buttocks, *u culo* [uˈgul]. Some adults affectionately refer to children's urinating as "doing *pisciàta*"

[pʰiˈʃad], from Neap *fà na pisciàta.* Finally, when a child goes out to play in the snow, he must remember to wear his *cuppulìcchio* [kupʰəˈlitʃ], or knitted hat.

Fuss/fret words:

Italians are stereotypically a fussy bunch, characterized by being great worriers, frequently with a penchant for histrionics and exaggerations. One must be delicate with Italians so as not to make them upset, thereby 'giving them *àceto'* [ˈadʒɪdə]. *Àceto* literally means, 'acid,' but in this expression, it more accurately denotes 'acid indigestion.' Worrisome topics of conversation can make Italians feel upset, as if they were suffering from heartburn. When forced to listen to loud, obnoxious music or to repetitive conversations, older Italians may protest, complaining that the noisiness is 'getting on the *chiòcca'* [ˈkjuək]. *A chiòcca* means 'brain' in Neapolitan and is preserved in Italo-American practically only in this expression of protest. Italian Americans occasionally crave a particular food voraciously. When this happens, they claim that they have a *vulìo* [a wouˈli] for the food. Italians soon tire of each other's over-dramatizations of mundane things and admonish each other against making *a mossa* [a ˈmuəs]. This word, which literally means 'motion or gesture', has taken on the meaning in Italo-American of exaggerated and often insincere expression. Someone who 'makes *mosses*' whines excessively, fawns over others or generally makes a grand fuss, either in a positive or negative way, over someone or something. Some New Haven Italians have

even coined the adjective *mossy* for those cry-babies or sycophants who meet the above description. One possible explanation for the survival of this dialectal word in Italo-American today is the absence of a good English equivalent.

Titles & epithets:

The Italo-American vocabulary of New Haven contains a substantial number of nouns and adjectives which furnish names for and/or descriptions of people. Positive meanings are attached to only a small group of them, most of which are titles of respect and affection reserved for members of the extended family. The overwhelming majority of the vocabulary items in this category, however, are negative, critical and derisive. Some possible reasons for the negative nature of so many nouns and adjectives in Italo-American may be 1) the critical nature of Italian Americans, a people that espouses a rigid code of respect and is highly conscious of what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate behavior; 2) the allure of an esoteric vocabulary for the purpose of ridiculing another, especially an outsider to the community; 3) the somewhat euphemizing nature of foreign vocabulary which renders the connotations of words softer than those of their English equivalents.

As mentioned above, the positive nouns and adjectives in Italo-American mostly refer to special guardian-like individuals within the context of an extended Italian family. A few others seem addressed to people who possess youth and beauty. Perhaps the most common reverent 'guardian' word used today by some Italian American children is the

title *nonna* [ˈnuən], for grandparent, usually for grandmother.* Some little children learn from their parents to call their grandmothers 'nawnie,' and this diminutive arises from Italian. Two other terms which are not as common nowadays as in decades past are *a zì* and *o zì* [a, o zi]. Although these words literally mean 'aunt' and 'uncle' respectively (stand. it. *zio,-a*), they can be applied to special family friends who play a guardians' role for children. In the same vain, the cognomens *cummàra* [guˈmad] and *cumpàre* [guˈmad], are traditionally reserved for women and men of special relation who have proved themselves to be guardians. For earlier generations of Italians, *cummàra* and *cumpàre* have been titles equivalent to 'godmother/godfather,' given to those who have sponsored a child in baptism. Drawing from the sense of 'sponsor' the words were applied to Italians who were already residing in the US who sponsored immigrants arriving from Italy. At certain times during the great immigration, immigrants were required to have sponsors, and the sponsors frequently housed and fed the new arrivals for a period of time. Such sponsors were affectionately called *cummàras* and *cumpàres.* Today the words have lost their earlier specific meanings and now tend to mean simply 'close friends' when used positively. We shall see, however, that the words today now frequently carry negative connotations as well.

Before turning to the negative vocabulary items, it is worth mentioning that there are a couple of positive dialect terms that do not bear the sense of 'guardian' or 'friend.' These are seldom used by young speakers of Italo-American, but they still exist for older speakers. *Criaturo* means 'child' in Neapolitan. When some speakers of Italo-American

* This word seems identical to the standard Italian *nonno, -a*, with Italo-American sound rules applied, but

refer to someone as a *criatùro* [grijə'dud], they are speaking tenderly of that person, claiming that the person is young, literally or figuratively, and therefore 'innocent.' One of the only other complementary items remaining is the adjective *bell'*, preserved almost exclusively within the expression *cume si bell'* ['kumə zi 'bɛl], which means 'how beautiful you are!' Grandmothers may shout this compliment at their grandchildren, usually squeezing the grandchildren's cheeks as they do so.

While positive and complimentary Italo-American words are few and waning in popularity, negative, critical and derisive words and expressions are numerous and secure. Italo-American possesses words reserved for outsiders to the Italian American community and for unintelligent, disreputable or annoying people both outside and in. Perhaps the most crucial slur for someone outside of the Italian American community is *merigàn* [mɛdi'gan]. *Merigàn* is the Southern Italian word for 'American,' but its significance is not quite that simple; the two words do not equal one another. For most Italian Americans, *merigàns* are non-Italian (and probably non-Jewish or -Polish as well) white Americans. Moreover, *merigàn* does not merely designate race or ethnicity but also *modus vivendi et pensandi.* For example, plenty of Italian American men fought in the United States Armed Forces during WWII, the Korean War and others. Those men would not hesitate to proclaim themselves proud, patriotic American citizens, but most would hasten to deny sharply having much in common with the *merigàns.* At the time when Italians were mostly an immigrant people in a strange land, they recognized the need to mistrust the *merigàns*, whom they often justifiably believed to be attempting to

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the word does not seem to be a part of Neapolitan, Basilicattese or Sicilian dialects, based on dialectal

impede the Italians' progress and upward mobility. The animosities and mistrust of the past have now subsided a great deal, but, nevertheless, Italian Americans have inherited from their immigrant ancestors a sense of separateness from and sometimes superiority over other Americans. They have long maintained that they cook, eat, live and raise better families than other Americans—the *merigàns*. By this they usually mean that they tend to cook and eat larger quantities and varieties of foods more frequently than other Americans, and that their family members tend to be closer, both physically and emotionally, than their *merigàn* counterparts. In fact the term *merigàn* has been applied by Italian Americans to those fellow Italian Americans who appear to be adopting too many of the negative 'American' ways.

Historically one particular subset of the *merigàn* species once distinguished itself as the true nemesis, even antithesis of the Italian American community—the Irish American community. Irish and Italian Americans have shared more common traits than they will ever be willing to admit—from religion, to neighborhood, to labor interests, to status as newcomers. Large waves of Irish immigrants beat the Italians to the US by more than half a century, and so they were slightly more established and in direct competition with the Italians when the Italians arrived. The only reason why this is worth mentioning here is that Italian Americans have, much more commonly in the past, employed an Italo-American epithet for the Irish, *arèsh* [a'deɪʒ].* As Italian Americans have succeeded, in the second half of the 20th century, in attaining equal employment status and housing

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dictionaries.

* Unfortunately I know neither the best way to spell this word nor the word's precise origin.

status with the Irish, tensions between Italians and Irish have steadily declined, and so has the use of this term.

While tensions between Italian Americans and the Irish or other white Americans have relaxed, the same has not always been true concerning tensions with black Americans. As large numbers of Italian Americans have emptied out of their urban blocks in New Haven's Hill Section, parts of Fair Haven and other sections of the city, black Americans have most often replaced them. It has been common for some Italian Americans to express disapproval over perceived contrasts between their own lifestyles and values and those of some blacks who now occupy parts of former Italian neighborhoods. The Italo-American dialect has developed a derogatory term for the black Americans, *mulignàna* [mulɪˈɲam̩]. The word has already been mentioned above as the Neapolitan word for 'eggplant.' The word's association with 'black skin color' is probably drawn from the expression *nira cume na mulignàna,* 'black as an eggplant,' and its connection with color is ancient. The etymology is said to be the Greek word *mulinìa,* 'black stain, bruise,' and native Neapolitan speakers of Campania today continue to associate the figurative meaning of 'black-and-blue' with the word.[22] Ethnic dialects have a strong tendency to retain esoteric terms of disparagement. The figurative sense of this word in tandem with its literal sense of "eggplant" have most likely cooperated to grant the word its staying power.

Having considered some Italo-American slurs for outsiders, let us now turn to in-group epithets, beginning with the leading slur that Italian Americans reserve only for

other Italian Americans, *cavòne* [kə'voun]. Literally meaning 'peasant' in Neapolitan, *cavòne,* in New Haven Italo-American, is steeped in connotations suggesting 'uncouth,' 'low class,' and 'ill-mannered.' All of the negative stereotypes laid upon Italian Americans by outsiders can be summed up with the word *cavòne*. In fact, New Haven Italians would be likely to label stereotypically base Italian characters portrayed in movies and on television *cavònes*. D'Ascoli derives this word from an Oscan verb meaning 'to hoe,' an etymology which strongly supports the Neapolitan sense of 'rural peasant.' Guaraldi, on the other hand, derives the word from the Greek *kakòphonos*, 'unpleasant sound,'—the same root that yields 'cacophony' in English. If the latter etymology is valid, then the evolution of the word in New Haven Italo-American may possibly constitute a regression to a more archaic sense, as even some of the youngest Italo-American speakers surveyed supplied glosses such as 'loud mouthed' and 'obnoxious' for *cavòne.*

Closely related to *cavòne* is the term *spaccòne* [ʃpə'koun], which has preserved its Neapolitan meaning of 'braggart, one who boasts' fairly well in Italo-American parlance. However, one can scarcely separate this word from images of gold-chain-sporting, money-wad-flashing, hot-rodding, souped-up, slicked back 'Guidos.' In a society for which subtlety, a screen of privacy and a closed mouth have, at various times, meant the difference between survival and demise, types who fit the *spaccòne* bill tend to find themselves held in low esteem.

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[22] I derive all etymologies from one of two sources: 1) D'Ascoli, Francesco. *Dizionario etimologico napoletano.* (Napoli: Edizione del Delfino, 1979) and 2) Guaraldi, Mario. *La parlata napolitana: nuove ipotesi semantiche.* (Napoli: Editrice Fiorentino, 1982).

Beside the loud, the obnoxious and the boasters, another character type that is a favorite target in Italo-American speech is the dim-wit. A fairly common term for a fool, especially one who is, perhaps, verbally challenged, is *mammalùcco* [mamə'luk]. The word comes from the Arabic *mamluk*, 'slave,' a name once used in Egypt for slaves brought from Turkey. A similar term is *mammòne* [ma'moun], usually applied to a big, clumsy oaf. In Neapolitan, however, *mammòne* has more the sense of 'boogie man,' an imaginary figure who frightens children. The transformation to the sense of 'idiot' in Italo-American is unclear. Perhaps its resemblance to *mammalùcco* and its *-òne* suffix, usually contained by derogatory words, have motivated the semantic shift. Additionally, the word could have borne the connotation of 'dummy' even among certain Southern Italian immigrants who may have been in touch with an archaic sense of the word, as *mammòne* is also derived from an Arabic word, *maimum*, meaning 'monkey.' Neapolitan speakers also traditionally assign figurative connotations of 'unintelligent person' to names of vegetables. As mentioned above, the words *cuccòzza* [ku'guts] and *cetrùlo* [ʃə'drul] literally mean 'squash' and cucumber' for Italian Americans, but they figuratively mean 'idiot' as well. Perhaps the double meaning has contributed to the words' longevity within Italo-American, as in the case of *mulignàna*. The off-color Neapolitan noun *cazzo*, a name for male genitalia, is a another very popular 'dunce' word heard in several expressions. *Cazzo* is nearly always applied to a male, one can be considered 'a *nu cazz*'* for such reasons as being either exceptionally dense or even 'henpecked' by his spouse.

Some more popular New Haven Italo-American dunce words are the adjectives *scostumato* [ʃkustuˈmad] and *stunato* [stuˈnad], which can also be used as nouns. The former carries the connotation of 'ill-mannered,' 'unrefined.' The latter, literally meaning both 'musically out of tune' and 'stunned' in Neapolitan, conjures up images of one who is 'dazed and confused,' perhaps even 'stoned.'

This next 'dunce word' illustrates a fascinating development of meaning; the word is *ciùccio* [ˈtʃutʃ]. *Ciùccio* literally means 'donkey, ass.' For speakers of Neapolitan, *ciùccio*, (derived from Greek *kykkos,* stupid) bears the obvious figurative meaning of 'dumb, illiterate person.' Italian immigrants in New Haven, however, familiar with hard physical labor and weary of the more established persons' attempts to profit off of their sweat, have led the word's evolution to emphasize the sense of 'beast of burden.' New Haven Italian Americans today might more accurately gloss the word *ciùccio* with the English 'push over' or 'workhorse.' The word has come to mean 'one who, usually due to a lack of self-esteem or sense of self-worth, allows others to take advantage of him and treat him like a beast of burden.' One Italian American may be heard warning another thus: 'don't you be a *ciùccio* for nobody,' i.e. 'don't let anyone sit back and force you to do all of the hard work.'

Italian Americans of New Haven do not limit their dialect-borne criticisms to the 'dim wits' but rather maintain a host of colorful expressions such as the following. A stubborn, thick headed person earns the title of *capotuòsto* [kabəˈduəst], which literally means 'hard head.' An individual with a sour looking face can be said to wear a *muss'e puòrco* [museɪˈboɪk],or 'mouth/lips of a pig.' An excessively talkative man is labeled

chiacchiaròne [kjakjə'doʊn], and his female counterpart *chiacchiarèssa* [kjakjə'deɪs]; both nouns are derived from the Neapolitan verb *chiacchiarià*, 'to blabber and gossip.' The greedy are named *mort'efammas* [moɹteɪ'vamz], meaning literally 'dying of hunger,' because they are thought to grasp and clutch all around them with the same voracity in which a starving person would grab and devour food. For those who are lethargic and lack energy the adjectives *ammusciàto* [mu'ʃad] and *mùscio* ['muʃ] are applied. Crazy people are dismissed as *pazzo*.*

Italian American culture, like all Latin cultures, is one which tends to prize machismo. Italo-American possesses the slur *mezafèmmena* [mɛza'vɛm] for a man thought of as effeminate or homosexual. The compound literally means 'half a woman.' A cowardly man may be dismissed as a *cacasòtto* [kaka'zoʊt]. The literal meaning is 'one who defecates in his pants,' which follows from the concept that fright leads to diarrhea. It should also come as no surprise that the dialect possesses a term for a man whose wife is cheating on him; such is called a *curnùto* [kor'nud]; similar words exist in other Latin languages, and the term is thought to have been known with the same definition even among the ancient Greeks. *Curnùto* means 'horned,' and the ancients observed that the males of a certain species of horned bird were wont to sleep in other male's nests, until the other males caught them and ejected them. Thus, when a woman lies with a man who is not her husband, she is said to make her husband 'wear horns.'

* A number of New Haven Italian Americans believe that the dialectal word for "crazy" is *'sci pazzo* ['ʃi'pats], but this stems from a failure to make proper separation between words in a phrase. *'Sci pazzo* derives from the expression *mi fa asci pazzo*, 'it makes me go crazy.'

Now the negative meanings of the words *cummàra* [gu'mad] and *cumpàre* [gum'bad] shown above are also within the sexual realm and merit mention. The wholesome values of these words, i.e. 'sponsor, godparent, close friend.' For New Haven Italians today, the words' negative sense, which is that of 'extramarital partner,' seems to be taking the lead in popularity, forcing out the more wholesome meaning in a typical case of 'taboo avoidance.' A man who is seeing a mistress is said 'to have *a cummàra.*' Both the positive and negative senses of the word exist even in Neapolitan.

Verbs

The epithet *scùccio* ['skuts] provides a reasonable segue into a discussion of Italo-American verbs, as it is derived from the Neapolitan verb *scuccià*, which shows up simply as 'to *skooch*' in Italo-American. *Scuccià* literally means to 'bother or harass someone.' It is a combination of *cioccia*, one Neapolitan word for 'brain' and the negating affix *s-* to produce the sense of 'undoing one's mind.' Among New Haven Italians, a 'skooch' or one who *skooches* is a 'prankster' who annoys people specifically by playing jokes and fooling around all of the time.

Scuccià and two other Italo-American verbs—*schivà,* (stem=[ʃkiv], or "shkeeve" for our purposes) and *scumparì* [ʃkumba'di]—furnish some of the most interesting examples of specialized meanings that have come about within New Haven from

Neapolitan words. 'To shkeeve' is one of the best known and widely used Italo-American words in New Haven, one that has been adopted even by a number of non-Italians who have had extensive contact with Italian Americans. The key to the word's success is the fact that, not only is there no English equivalent, but the word's concept is completely innovative and unique. For New Haven Italians, 'shkeeve' is most often an active verb that expresses what can only be expressed in the passive, in standard English, standard Italian and most other Indo-European languages.* Perhaps the best way to define 'shkeeve' is to say that it is 'what the speaker does to that which disgusts, repels or sickens him. A person 'shkeeves' vomit, excrement, germs, filth, individuals with poor hygiene and whatever else disgusts or repels him. The active verb 'to shkeeve' most likely derives from the Southern Italian *schivà*, which means to 'shun' or 'avoid.' For instance, a woman in Naples, irate over her husband's philandering, can eject him from the house, wishing never to see him again, with the words *io ti schivo,* 'I shun you!' New Haven Italians, however, never 'shkeeve' people on moral grounds but only on questionable hygienic grounds. Indeed the sense of 'shunning' or 'avoiding' is not at all accurate in Italo-American, because one need not avoid something at all to 'shkeeve' it. One can clean rather than avoid a filthy latrine, 'shkeeving' it the whole time. The verb 'to shkeeve' is fascinating, and it is also malleable. Some people have even transformed the verb into a noun and can produce phrases like 'a piece of 'shkeeve,'' equivalent to Yiddish *schmutt,* something dirty and despicable. The adjectival form *schifoso* [ʃkiˈvous] and other variants thereof are also quite popular.

* Even the most similar expression in Italian and in many dialects, *mi fa schifo*, 'it disgusts me' is passive. Other Italian American communities preserve that expression by saying 'it shkeeves me.' They are <u>not</u> as

The Neapolitan verb *scumparì* [ʃkumbaˈdi] has undergone an interesting specialization in meaning among New Haven Italians, and it is perhaps one of the most culturally marked words in all of their Italo-American vocabulary. The literal meaning of the verb is 'to disappear.' Yet the majority of the subjects surveyed who were familiar with the word glossed it as 'to be embarrassed.' To understand how this transformation in meaning has come about, an understanding of the cultural context for the word is essential. The sense of *scumparì* that survives in New Haven Italo-American derives from the expression *nun mi fate scumparì,* 'don't make me disappear.' The expression means, 'don't make me want to vanish out of embarrassment.' Embarrassment over what? Here is where the specialized meaning comes in. When a person *scumparìs*, he is embarrassed over not having put out a big enough spread or spent enough money at a special occasion, perhaps for a special person. In other words, he is embarrassed because he has skimped; his peers may now view him as cheap. An Italian American trying to decide whether to spend a certain amount of money on a present for someone who is special to him might be warned by a friend 'not to *scumparì*.' It seems that Italian-American culture, full of norms that dictate expectations of generosity and reciprocity among individuals, is responsible for the endurance of this word in Italo-American speech.

The rest of the Italo-American verbs are nearly always used in the imperative or are little more than interjections. Examples include *aspett'* [aˈʃpɛtʰ], meaning 'wait a minute' and *state zitto* [statəˈzitʰ], meaning 'shut up.' Although not a command, the

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innovative as New Haveners, who convert the passive sense into an active, transitive verb!

famous, frequently rhetorical interrogatory word *capisc'?* [kaˈbiʃ] or sometimes [eɪ gaˈbi], falls into this token category as well. These words are short, curt, basic and common verbs often said to and learned by children.

Interjections

The two categories of New Haven Italo-American words that remain are interjections and an extension of interjections which are simply unpleasant and vulgar expressions. The "G-rated" interjections always express surprise, disapproval or approval. *Azzò* [aˈtsoʊ] mentioned above expresses surprise and usually disapproval. *Mang'e cane* [maŋgeɪˈgan] is similar to *azzò*, only stronger. Literally meaning 'not even a dog,' this expression, common in the Campania region of Italy, is usually taken, both there and in New Haven, to mean 'God forbid! No one deserves something as terrible as that!' *Madonna mia* [maˈduənami], literally meaning 'my dear Blessed Mother,' can express disapproval, as at the hearing of some tragic news, or extreme approval, as at the sight of an incredibly attractive person. *N'ata vota* [nadaˈwuəd], literally meaning 'another time, again' is a dying expression but one that is used typically by older Italian Americans to express bother at seeing or hearing something too many times. Now consistent with the Italian Americans' love for dramatic complaining and with their habit of expressing such complaints (i.e. *'mosses'*) in dialect, two dialectal expressions can be fairly commonly heard to express disapproval at the sight of an ugly person and at the encounter of a foul stench. The expressions are *cum' è brutt'* [ˈgumeɪ ˈbrutʰ] and *cume*

puzz' ['gumeɪ 'buts] respectively. The expressions mean literally 'how ugly' and 'how it stinks' respectively. Formed by the same paradigm are the expressions *cume si bello* [gumǝzi'bɛl] and *cume si chiama* [gumǝzi'gjam]. These expressions literally mean "how beautiful you are" and "what's his name/whatchumucallit" respectively.

Finally Italo-American possesses a rich variety of unsavory expressions, (and each one can speak volumes about the psychology of the group that makes use of them.) Italian American culture, particularly that of older Italian Americans who have had more contact with the immigrants than do the current generations, preserves the Southern Italian fondness for oaths. Even when some second generation Italian Americans are speaking English, they are wont to curse their enemies with expressions such as '*May* he drop dead!' or '*May* they break their two legs!' In all cases of this construction, particular emphasis rests upon the word 'may'; speakers lean into the auxiliary verb as if thus to seal the mystical curse and send it forth to unfold. Such expressions are most likely drawing the sentiment directly from similar oaths in dialect. Some speakers still utter harsh expletives such as *che pozza crepà* [kə'buətsəgədəba], meaning 'may he/she/you die or split open' and the more concise *schiàtt* ['ʃkjat^{h}], meaning the same thing. Following in the same line of oaths is *che pozza gettà o sangue*, usually pronounced [buətʃjɛtou'zaŋgɪdə] with considerable reduction of syllables, meaning 'may he/she/you throw up blood.' In both expressions just mentioned the *pozza* ['buəts] is the present subjunctive form of the Neapolitan verb *potè,* 'to be able to,' and it corresponds directly to the stressed and elongated '*may*' in oaths uttered in English. Italian Americans who utter the above expressions in Americanized Neapolitan rarely intend the literal meanings

to be understood. Many people who use the second *'pozza'* expression do not seem even to be aware that they are wishing someone to vomit blood. The expressions are merely strong interjections uttered against those despised by the speakers.

Having presented some oaths that concern themselves with physical outcomes, we turn to another type of oath of which Southern Italians are enamored, those of a more spiritual nature. Some ill-natured Neapolitans have a habit of seeking to gain shock value by damning enemies' souls to hell or by blaspheming sacred images. Some Italian Americans, especially those who are children or grandchildren of immigrants, have adopted this nasty habit from their forefathers. *Mannàggia*, pronounced as it looks, is the tool for damning, as it means 'cursèd be...' (It derives from the expression *male ne aggia*, 'may he have badness'). Of particular note are blasphemies of religious figures and of dear ones. A common example of the former is *mannàggia Madonna* [mana'dʒamaduən], 'curse the Blessed Mother.' An example of the latter is *chi t'a muòrt'* [kida'mwort^{h}]. This expression is a shortened version of *mannàggia chi t'a muòrto*, which means literally 'damn to hell he (of your loved ones) who has died on you.' These expressions are singularly harsh, unpleasant and irreverent, but seemingly few Italian Americans actually use them today, and those who do seldom really know the significance of these utterances. Like the expressions in the preceding paragraph, as their meanings become increasingly opaque to modern speakers, they are reduced to playful and fairly harmless interjections.

3. THE SPEAKERS, AND WHAT THEY KNOW:

Aside from describing the Italo-American dialect of New Haven, I wished to determine answers to some of the following questions: 1) how strong a correlation is there between the age of the speaker and the number of words with which he is familiar? 2) which words are the most familiar overall, and which are the least?

To determine the answers I compiled a survey (Appendix B) that asked subjects to list, among other things, their ages in a biographical section at the beginning. In the second section of the survey, subjects viewed a list of 75 Italo-American lexical items, spelled first in 'correct' form—that is to say in a form obtained from a Neapolitan dictionary[23]—and then in a pseudo-English orthography, through which the subjects could "sound out" the words, if they failed to recognize the words from the more formal spellings. I had invented the *ad hoc* pseudo-English, semi-phonetic orthography, and so I needed to explain what the symbols intended to express in a pronunciation key, located immediately before the word list section. The speakers were asked to indicate their familiarity with the items on the survey by providing their own glosses for each item in a corresponding blank space on the far right of the page. At the bottom of the survey's last page I left another blank space for speakers to add any items that they considered significant Italo-American words, but which did not appear on the survey.

I will presently summarize the data which the surveys generated and discuss the results, but before the reader judges the data, I first wish to point out several weaknesses of my survey. In general, the survey was not as thorough or exhaustive as it ideally could have been in the material that it tested; also several different factors possibly inject bias

into the results. To begin, the survey was not exhaustive because it only tested 75 words out of more than 120 "typical" New Haven Italo-American vocabulary items. The reasons for this are varied. I have been undertaking an on-going compilation of items as I think of them and as people with whom I speak mention them to me, and I did not have as complete a list of items at the time of survey distribution as I do at present. I intentially omitted from the survey the more offensive and vulgar expressions out of discretion. I also intentionally kept the word list limited to 75 items out of courtesy to the subjects. I had to make careful decisions regarding what types of words to include and what types to omit. I believe that most of my choices were reasonable, but they could have been better, perhaps.

Several factors may have been sources of possible bias. I did not take great pains to randomize the sample of subjects. My distribution method was informal: I handed stacks of surveys to individuals whom I believed to be capable of reaching a number of Italian Americans who might be willing to participate in the survey. They distributed those surveys and collected as many completed forms as possible.* Those who chose to participate in the survey may have been a self-selected group to some extent; a number of them may have been confident in their repertoire of Italo-American lexical items, and some who might have been less confident may have passed up the survey. If the subject pool was at all self selected, that could have introduced bias to the results. The informal distribution and collection methods also led the different age groups to be inconsistently

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[23] Salzano, Antonio. *Vocabulario napoletano-italiano, italiano-napoletano.* (Napoli: Edizioni del Giglio, 1980).

* I distributed more than 200 surveys and received just over 90 filled out. A significant number of individuals enthusiastically filled out surveys and then never returned them to me, and so the number of surveys in circulation unfortunately exceeds the number that returned to me for analysis!

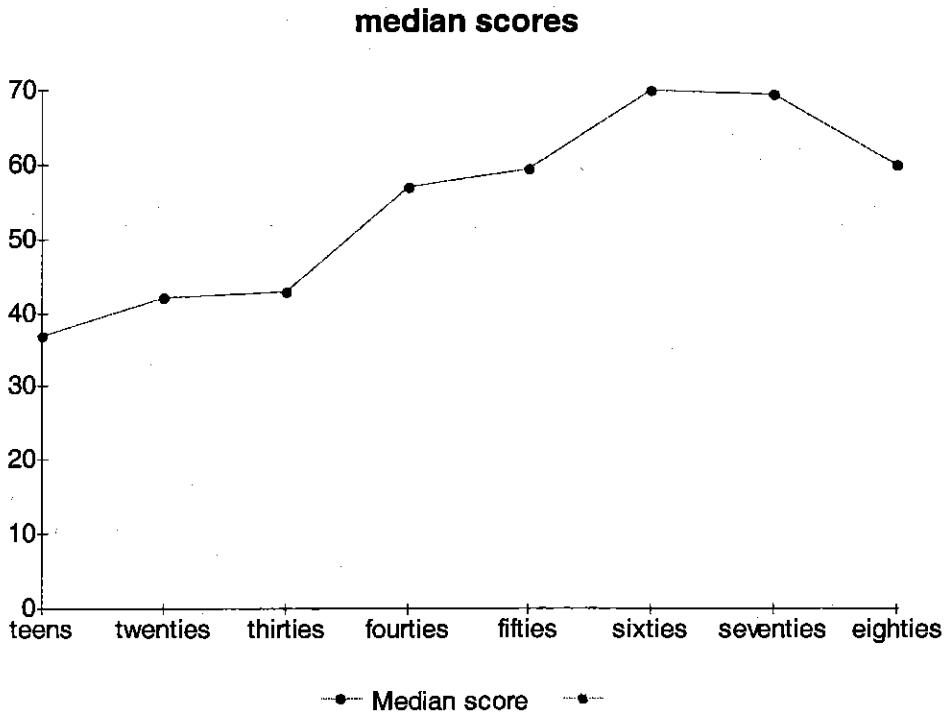
represented; in fact certain age groups were markedly underrepresented. When the subjects were filling out their surveys, I was not present to enforce my request for unassisted testing. Any subject who possibly could have been helped by another individual to provide glosses for words that would not otherwise have been familiar to him would have introduced some bias to the results. Finally both forms of the spelling used to notate the items may have been opaque to some subjects, preventing those subjects from glossing words that they actually knew by rendering some words unclear to them. This factor was clearly significant among the elderly subjects, many of whom benefited from little formal education and were unaccustomed to such surveys, and this probably explains the surprisingly low scores of those subjects, who should have known nearly every word on the survey.

Having honestly declared the potential flaws of my survey, however, I wish to assure the reader that I am confident that most of my data is, nevertheless, valid, and that the sample represents the population quite well overall (except in the case of the most elderly subjects) because the results seem to fulfill rational expectations.

Age and word recognition

Group	Range	Mean	Median	Mode	Stand. Dev.
teens	5-51	34.2	37	NA	14.825841
twenties	14-62	40.6	42	42	12.789699
thirties	21-66	40.1	43	43	14.932501
fourties	44-62	40.1	57	NA	6.8332919
fifties	8-73	54.6	59.5	67	16.024769
sixties	18-74	58.6	70	70, 71	16.308689
seventies	30-72	60.4	69.5	71	15.960672
eighties	22-67	52.3	60	NA	18.198558

The table above summarizes some statistics relating subjects' age groups and the number of acceptable glosses they provided for items on the survey. Each number in the range, mean, median and mode columns represents a total of acceptable responses given out of 75 items tested. Note the considerable ranges of scores in each age group. To gain a sense of the correlation between age group and word recognition I consider the median scores of each age group. I feel that this statistic is the most representative of the sample because it is the most resistant to the extreme scores in each group. Below is graphical representation of the median scores as a function of subjects' ages.



The graph shows that, as one might expect, general familiarity with Italo-American lexical items lessens with each younger group of speakers.* This is quite logical if one considers that the oldest speakers have had the most contact with immigrants who conversed freely in Italian dialects, and the youngest speakers have had the least contact with such speakers but the most typically "American" experience. According to the graph, overall familiarity with Italo-American vocabulary dropped considerably between speakers in their 60s and those in their fifties, less between those in their fifties and those in their forties, considerably between those in their forties and those in their thirties, and the rate of decay appears to be leveling off among the 30-somethings, 20-somethings and

* The sudden drop in scores among the octogenarians clearly reflects experimental error and should be disregarded as invalid. That age group was, first of all, underrepresented—only four acceptable surveys emerged from that group. The octogenarians were the least educated adult group, and so they tended to be less adept than others at deciphering the orthography on the survey. They also appear to have had the lowest

teenagers. That is merely what the graph shows, but the survey results probably do not stem from a large enough sample to confirm such patterns in the population.

Relative familiarity among words

Having established that overall familiarity with Italo-American vocabulary seems to vary fairly inversely proportionally with age, what remains to be observed from the survey results is which words are the most and least familiar. Appendix C contains a list of the words that appeared on the survey in descending order of popularity, and I suggest that the reader merely view the list circumspectly. In general, it is difficult to view the order in which the survey results have placed the words as revealing any simple, comprehensive pattern or patterns. Some things to note are that more than half of all the subjects recognized 77% of all of the words on the survey. This should bode well for the future of Italo-American in New Haven. 71% of the words in the top three quarters and 54% of the top half of the list are food items, while only 28% of the bottom half and 0% of the bottom quarter are food items. The relative standing of those various items in terms of popularity does not seem to adhere to any comprehensive pattern, but food items are definitely popular and therefore not likely to be dropped from the Italo-American vocabulary soon. *Stunàto* and *ammusciàto* were the most popular adjectives, earning higher than 75% recognition, most likely because they tend to be words that mother use when referring to their children, and they are therefore learned early. The verb "to shkeeve" earned 85% recognition, most likely because of the semantic void in English

attention spans, as a number of them left large portions of the survey, such as the entire second page, blank.

that it fills, and the formulaic imperatives *state zitto* and *aspètt'* earned only slightly less than that, most likely because they are short, "hip," easily learned expressions.

It is also generally more difficult to understand the lack of popularity of the words in the lower half of the list than it is to explain the popularity of the words in the upper half. *A còtena* and *sanguinàccio* are food items that have waned in popularity, most likely in account of their makeup. The decline of concept of what it means to *scumparì* may reflect that younger Italians are becoming less concerned with Italian traditions such as lavish spreads and more like good Americans, concerned with saving money. A wash basin such as *vascìle* may be less common in the age of; an association between human facial features and those of a pig are less likely to be made as Italian Americans distance themselves further in time from the rural life of Southern, and therefore younger Italian Americans are less likely to use words such as *muss'e puòrco* to describe someone. Nevertheless, there is not a good reason for the low familiarity levels of each word in the lower 50% of the survey. The lack of transparency in the words' orthography on the survey could also have skewed the results, rendering words that people really know and use momentarily irrecognizable. Nevertheless, the extremely low familiarity levels of *criaturo, fràceto* and *chiòcca* probably reveal that these words shall not last very much longer in New Haven Italo-American.

CONCLUSION

The survey itself was the greatest obstacle to their demonstration of their knowledge.

A substantial portion of the Italian American community of New Haven speaks a unique variant of American English that is characterized by a fairly significant amount of borrowing from dialects of Italy, most notably from the Neapolitan dialect. The borrowed words have adopted English morphology and have evolved phonologically in this American community since the time of their initial borrowing. Nevertheless, the ideolects of many speakers have maintained fairly well a number of phonological features and ambiguities that existed even in the substrate dialects.

From my own observations and from suggestions that subjects wrote in at the bottom of their surveys, I can conclude that the New Haven Italian American community shares a fairly discrete and consistent core of borrowings in its Italo-American lingo. I have noted that the borrowing from the dialects has not been entirely haphazard, but rather the borrowed items generally lend themselves to fairly distinct categories.

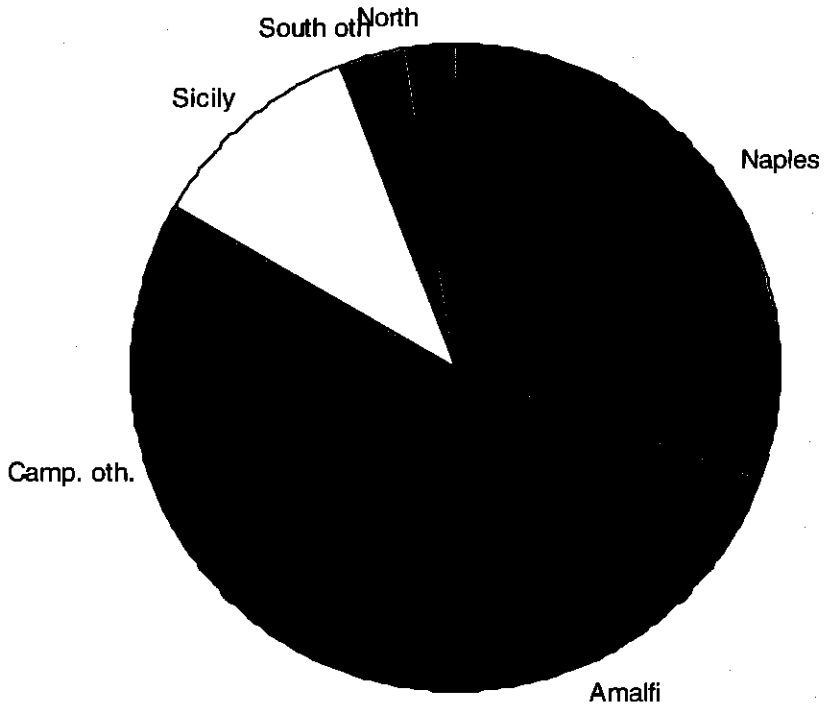
While it is impossible to account for each and every borrowed lexical item in terms of the reasons for which it has been maintained or the reasons for which it enjoys the level of popularity among speakers that it does, one can point to certain motivating factors for preserving dialectal items. The most important factor is the filling of lexical gaps in English. Some lexical gaps are the names of specialty items associated with the community, such as a particular coffee pot and particular types of cuisine. Other lexical gaps may concern concepts associated with the community's culture, such as its expectations of reciprocity or its penchant for hyperbole. In order to fill the latter type of gaps, a number of words borrowed from dialects have evolved among Italian-American speakers and have come to acquire specialized meanings. Another motivating factor may be referred to as "in-group solidarity." This means the speakers' desires to make

compliments, curses and disparagement's in an esoteric jargon, both to acknowledge their membership within a community that shares such a jargon and to limit the comprehension of such terms to other community members, while keeping outsiders in the dark.

Of course the presence of a large, cohesive community is a prerequisite to the maintenance of a jargon such as New Haven Italo-American. Without a large community whose members interact much among themselves and who are resistant to scattering and to extensive mingling with members of other groups, the environment would not be fertile enough to allow a speech code such as Italo-American to survive as well as it has in the New Haven area. That significant borrowed lexicon endures at all more than three quarters of a century after the last great immigration is a testament to the centralized and cohesive nature of New Haven's Italian community. Survey results indicate that familiarity with the community's speech code is declining with each subsequent generation, reflecting the fact that Americanization is a continuing process in the Italian American community even today. The survey also shows, however, that number of Italo-American lexical items with which the majority of speakers today are familiar exceeds the number of items with which they are unfamiliar. This means that, barring a sudden population shift or lifestyle change that would suddenly drive Italian Americans to leave the New Haven area and to scatter to diverse remote places, or to start dating and mating much more with individuals of other ethnicities, the Italo-American speech code is fairly safe at the turn of the 21st Century.

APPENDIX A: ITALIAN ORIGINS OF SPEAKER SAMPLE

Lacking official statistics regarding the percentages of New Haven's Italian settlers who came from each region, I include this chart, which summarizes the responses of a sample of Italian Americans whom I surveyed about their families' places of origin in Italy.



Of the subjects who provided places of origin for their families, 30.6% of their responses were "Naples"; 26.5% of their responses were "Amalfi"; 26.4% were locations in Campania other than Naples and Amalfi; 10.7% were "Sicily"; 3.3% were Southern locations not already mentioned, and only 2.5% were Northern Italian locations.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY OF ITALIANIZED ENGLISH

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. The first part involves some background information about the speaker. It is anonymous, so you are not expected to give your name. The second part tests recognition of certain words that tend to be most widely borrowed from dialects of Italian into English among certain residents of the New Haven area who are of Italian descent. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability, and please do them BY YOURSELF. If you know someone who might also like to do this survey, please give him a copy. The information which I obtain from this survey will be used in the preparation of my Senior Thesis for the Linguistics Department of Yale College. Thank you again!

1. Please indicate your age. _____.
2. Please indicate your sex. _____.

3. In what city/town do you currently reside? (Note: If the answer is New Haven, please specify the section, e.g. Fair Haven, the Hill Section, Morris Cove, Westville, etc.) _____.

4. In what city/town were you born? (Note: If answer is New Haven, please specify the section.)_____.

5. Please circle the phrase below that best describes you.
A) The child of two Italian immigrant parents. B) The child of one Italian immigrant parent. C) The grandchild of at least one Italian immigrant. D) The great-grandchild of at least one Italian immigrant. E) The great-great grandchild of at least one Italian immigrant. F) Uncertain or of other relation to Italian immigrant. G) Not of Italian origin at all.

6. If you are of Italian origin to any degree, please try to specify the part of Italy from which your immigrant relative(s) came. (Note: responses may be as specific as a particular town, e.g. "Amalfi" or "Salerno," or they may be more general like "near Naples," "in Sicily," "in le Marche," "in the North/ South." If you know that different sides of your family originated in different parts of Italy, please include that information as well.)

_____

_____.

7. Please circle the highest academic level that you have reached.

A) grammar school through grade 6. B) grammar school through grade 8. C) some of high school. D) graduation from high school. E) Bachelor's degree from college. F) Master's degree. G) Doctorate degree (PhD) H) Other: _____.

Following is a list of words that are commonly used by some Italian-Americans in the Greater New Haven Area. They have mostly been borrowed from the Neapolitan *(napoletano)* dialect. I have written each word in its original Neapolitan form and also in a made-up spelling system based on English spelling that gives one common American pronunciation for each word. In this exercise, I'd like you 1) to rate how familiar you are with each word, and 2) to give a brief definition for each word.

To rate how familiar you are with the word, use a scale from 1-4:

1 I know what this word means, and I use it myself on occasion.
2 I know what this word means but would never use it myself.
3 I have heard this word before, but I do not know what it means.
4 I have never heard of this word.

Key to pronunciation in weird English-like spelling:

The accented syllable is marked in capital letters: ex. maniGAWT. *(manicotti)* The accent is on the third syllable.

'a' is pronounced as in '*fa*ther.'
'i' is pronounced as in *'brick.'*
'oo' is always pronounced as in '*room.'*
'uke' is pronounced as in *'Luke.'*
'ay' is pronounced as in '*May.'*
'ee' is pronounced as in '*feel.'*
'uh' sounds like vowel in *'shut.'*
'aw' is pronounced as in '*jaw.'*
'ow' is pronounced as in '*throw.'*
'ie' is pronounced as in '*tie.'*
'j' sounds like the 'g' in the middle of the word *'garage'* or like "j" in "Jim."

Here is an example:

'ncòppa onGAWP __2. Means "on top of."

Here the word is given in Neapolitan, followed by a possible pronunciation by an American. Then the number 2 in this case means that the person taking the survey knows what the word is but does not ever use the word himself. If you've heard of a word but do not know what it means, put a question mark in the definition slot.

LIST

Neapolitan word	Pronunciation in Eng.	Rating #	Definition
1. *mappìna*	maPEEN	____	_____
2. *vacìle*	waJEEL	____	_____
3. *vulìo*	a woLEE	____	_____
4. *machinètta*	mageeNET	____	_____
5. *cuppulìcchio*	koopuhLEECH	____	_____
6. ???	baKAUZ	____	_____
7. *ciùccio*	chooch	____	_____
8. *chiòcca*	kyawk	____	_____
9. *chiacchiarone*	kyakyuhRONE	____	_____
10. *chiachierèssa*	kyakyuhRAYS	____	_____
11. *mammalùcco*	mamuhLUKE	____	_____
12. *cummàrra/pàre*	gooMAD/BAD	____	_____
13. *cavòne*	kaVONE	____	_____
14. *mosso/ -a ?*	mawss	____	_____
15. a *spesa*	a SHPAYZ	____	_____
16. *agita/àceto ?*	Ajiduh	____	_____
17. *tarantella*	daranDELL	____	_____
18. *criaturo*	greeyaDUR	____	_____
19. *cavatièlla*	cavuhDEEL	____	_____
20. *pastìna*	paSTEEN	____	_____
21. *past'e fasùlo*	pastuhvaZOOL	____	_____
22. *past'e piselli*	pastuhpiZEEL	____	_____
23. *cìcere*	CHEEjiduh	____	_____
24. *scaròla*	shkaDAWL	____	_____
25. *menèsta*	muhNEST	____	_____
26. *sciurìllo*	shooDEEL	____	_____
27. *vasenicòla*	vazuhneeGAWL	____	_____
28. *fenùcchio*	fuhNUKE	____	_____
29. *cetrùlo*	shuhDROOL	____	_____
30. *mulignàna*	moolinYAM	____	_____
31. *cucòzza*	kooGOOTS	____	_____
32. *arècata*	aRAYgiduh	____	_____
33. *castagna*	kaSTIEN	____	_____
34. *frittata*	freeTAD	____	_____
35. *brasciòla*	braJAWL	____	_____
36. *zuffritto*	sooFREET	____	_____
37. *pizzajòla*	peetsaYOOL	____	_____
38. *capecuòllo*	cabuhGOOL	____	_____
39. *a còtena*	a GOdinuh	____	_____
40. *baccalà*	bakaLA	____	_____

41. *a zuppa di pesce*	zoopuhdiBAYJ	____	_____
42. *cìculo*	CHEEKuhluh	____	_____
43. *sanguinàccio*	sangweeNACH	____	_____
44. *pizzella*	peetSAYL	____	_____
45. *fresèlla*	fruhZAYL	____	_____
46. *taràllo*	taDAL		
47. *strùffoli*	STROOFuhluh	____	_____
48. *zèppola*	TSAYpuhluh	____	_____
49. *bucchinòtto*	bukeeNAWT	____	_____
50. *cannuòlo (siciliano)*	caNOOL sijileeYAN	____	_____
51. ???	(an)jiNET	____	_____
52. *a zuppa*	aZOOP	____	_____
53. *a pizza chiena*	abeetsaGAYN	____	_____
54. *pignuòlo*	peenYOLE	____	_____
55. *anisètta*	anuhZET	____	_____
56. *ammusciato*	mooSHAD	____	_____
57. *mùscio*	moosh	____	_____
58. *scostumato*	shkoostooMAD	____	_____
59. *stunato*	stooNAD	____	_____
60. *pazzo*	patz	____	_____
61. *fràceto*	VRAgiduh	____	_____
62. *scumparì*	shkoombaDEE	____	_____
63. *scuccià*	skooch	____	_____
64. *schifare, schifo*	shkeev	____	_____
65. *aspett'*	aSHPET	____	_____
66. *faticà*	fatiGA	____	_____
67. *muss'e pòrca*	moosayBORK	____	_____
68. *muort'e famma*	mortayVAM	____	_____
69. *capa tosta*	kabaDAWST	____	_____
70. *atsò*	atSOW	____	_____
71. *n'ata volta*	nadaWAWD	____	_____
72. *mang'e cane*	MANgaygan	____	_____
73. *state zitto*	statuhZEET	____	_____
74. *com'è brutto*	goomayBROOT	____	_____
75. *com'è puzzo*	goomayBOOTS	____	_____

In the remaining space, I invite you to include any other words you may use that are of Italian origin and are not included in this survey. If you know the definitions of the words, please include them. Spelling of the Neapolitan/Italian is not important!

APPENDIX C: SURVEY RESULTS: RELATIVE POPULARITY OF SURVEYED WORDS

According to the results from the surveyed sample, listed below in descending order of popularity are the words that appeared on the survey. The number to the left of each word indicates the number of subjects who supplied acceptable glosses for each word out of the total 87 subjects whose surveys results have been considered.

86 *pastìna*
84 *cavatìella, past'e fasùlo*
79 *anisètta, stunàto*
78 *brasciòla, a zuppa di pesce*
77 *zèppola*
76 *scaròla, fresèlla*
75 *mulignàna, cannùolo*
74 *anginètta, pignùolo, schiv-*
73 *capecùolo, baccalà, apizza chiena, state zitto*
72 *cavone, fenùcchio, aspett'*
71 *mappìna, tarantella, zuffrìtto*
69 *past'e pisìelli, vasenicòla, pizzella, bucchinòtto*
68 *àceto*
67 *frittata*
66 *ammusciàto*
65 *menèsta***************************75%************************************
64 *pazzo*
63 *cucòzza, pizzaiùola*
61 *cummàra/cumpàre*
60 *vulìo, cìculo*
59 *ciùccio, azzò*
55 *cuppulicchio, a spesa, mùscio, capatuòsto, cum'e brutto*
54 *backauz, chiacchieròne, cìcere*
52 *macchinètta, mossa, arècata*
51 *muort'efamma*
50 *mammalùcco, cetrùlo, castagna*
49 *strùffoli*

----------50% familiarity line----------

45 *a còtena*
42 *scostumàto*
41 *chiacchieressa, cume puzza*
39 *taràllo*
38 *n'ata vota*
37 *sciurìllo*
34 *a zuppa, scumparì, scuccià, faticà*
33 *muss'e puòrco*
30 *sanguinàccio*
26 *vascìle, mang'e cane*
19 *criaturo, fràceto*
14 *chiòcca*

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