

*Languages of commerce as a source of innovation.  
The presence of English in Italian traders' writings*

The languages of commerce are a particular interesting area of historical sociolinguistics research, not just in the characteristics of trade argots themselves, but also in what traders' writings can reveal about the underlying dialects (Wagner /Beinhoff / Outhwaite 2017).

Even though evidence for Anglo-Italian contact prior to 1500 is rare, given the huge role played by Tuscans, Venetians and Genoese in the trade and finance of England in the later Middle Ages, there are the conditions for a mutual exchange of technical lexis<sup>1</sup>. This paper aims to examine Middle English contribution to Italian<sup>2</sup> in the semantic field of commerce, through the analysis of the correspondence, in a microscopic perspective, of Datini Company (1363-1422)<sup>3</sup> and of Ricciardi Company (1295-1303)<sup>4</sup>. Although setting a fixed line among contact phenomena occurring in the language system and those in speech/writing is very complex<sup>5</sup>, I will try to differentiate lexical borrowings from code switching forms, in other words English lexical material will be collocated either within early modern English in case of borrowings, or as switching products in case Anglicisms could be found in medieval sources only.

## References

- Castellani, A. / Del Punta I. 2005. *Lettere dei Ricciardi di Lucca ai loro compagni in Inghilterra (1295-1303)*. Roma: Salerno Editrice.
- Cella, R. 2010. Prestiti nei testi mercantili toscani redatti di là da le Alpi. Saggio di glossario fino al 1350. *La Lingua Italiana: Storia, strutture, testi* VI: 57–99.
- Halmari, H. 1997. *Government and Codeswitching. Explaining American Finnish*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Thomason, S. G. 2001. *Language contact. An introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Tiddeman, M. 2017. 'Early Anglo-Italian contact: new loanword evidence from two mercantile sources, 1440–1451, in Wagner Esther M. / Bettina Beinhoff / Ben Outhwaite (eds.) 2017.
- Trotter, D. 2011b. Italian merchants in London and Paris: evidence of language contact in the Gallerani accounts, 1305–08. In Dominique Lagorgette / Tim Pooley (eds.), *Mélanges pour R. Anthony Lodge*, Chambéry: Presses de l'Université de Savoie: 209–226.
- Wagner E. M. / B. Beinhoff / B. Outhwaite (eds.) 2017. *Merchants of innovation. The languages of traders*. Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Cella 2010, Trotter 2011, Tiddeman 2017.

<sup>2</sup> The label of Italian is used here for referring to Tuscan with which the English merchant community came into contact.

<sup>3</sup> Datini Archive is partially digitized, see <datini.archiviodistato.prato.it>.

<sup>4</sup> They are published in Castellani/Del Punta 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Thomason 2001; Halmari, 1997.