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ITALIAN ART TERMS IN SAMUEL JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (1755): THE PROCESS OF DETERMINOLOGIZATION**

Abstract: The influence of Italian art terminology, which persists across most European languages today, began to permeate English in the sixteenth century. Terms such as *intaglio*, *stucco* and *portico*, borrowed from the rich Italian artistic tradition, have enriched the English lexicon. However, a closer examination of the literary citations Samuel Johnson utilized to elucidate these terms may reveal a subtle transformation in their meanings. Some have undergone the process of determinologization, wherein their original specialized meanings have become less precise, blurred, or more ambiguous. This paper aims to identify and analyze such terms in Johnson's Dictionary in order to establish whether the process of determinologization has taken place. The results of the analysis suggest that by the eighteenth century, when Johnson was compiling his dictionary, some of these terms were already perceived as lexical units belonging not only to specific disciplinary domains but also to the elevated register of the general English language. This transfer is particularly evident in the realms of art and architecture, which have long fascinated not only experts but also laypeople, fostering a desire for a deeper understanding and appreciation of human creativity and its achievements.

Keywords: Italian art terminology, English, meaning, determinologization, historical lexicography.

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1. ITALIAN ART TERMS IN ENGLISH: AN INTRODUCTION

The Italian language has been a source of loanwords for other languages for centuries in various fields of human activity, especially in the field of art history (think of how widespread terms like *chiaroscuro*, *capriccio* and *veduta* are). In the sixteenth century, when Italian culture overwhelmed Europe through literature, political treatises, philosophy, court life codification, and especially art, European languages adopted numerous Italian words from various areas of social life (Motolese 2012, 12). The peak of Italian as the language of artistic communication in Europe occurred in the sixteenth century, continued into the seventeenth, and began to decline in the eighteenth century in favor of French (ibid. 7).

The lasting impact of this linguistic influence is evident in modern studies of Italian loanwords, such as those conducted within the VIVIT: VIVI ITALIANO project of the Crusca Academy. As part of the project, the so-called *Observatory of Italianisms in the World* (OIM, *Osservatorio degli italiani nel mondo*) was created—a database aimed at collecting Italianisms used in various languages. So far, within this section, the *Dictionary of Italianisms in French, English, and German*, known as DIFIT (*Dizionario degli italianismi nel francese, inglese e tedesco*), has been digitized and contains about 5,000 entries (Stammerjohann et al. 2008). According to Pizzoli, the OIM database shows that art vocabulary comprises the second largest number of entries after music (Pizzoli 2019, 154). Hence, it is no wonder that a large number of Italian terms present in the English language pertain specifically to the field of art (e.g. *architetto*, *balcone*, *bassorilievo*, *campanile*, *chiaroscuro*, *cornice*, *cupola*, *facciata*, *galleria*, *grottesca*, *loggia*, *modello*, *mosaico*, *parapetto*, *pastello*, *piedistallo*, *pilastro*, *rivellino*, *schizzo*, *stucco*, *zoccolo*). Additionally, it is well known that specialized terminology is one of the most important transmitters of foreign words in cultural borrowing (Klajn 1971, 95).

2. THE PROCESS OF BORROWING: FROM ITALIAN TO ENGLISH

Trade between England and Italy flourished in the late Middle Ages, fostering cultural and linguistic exchange. As a result, English travelers to the Continent became increasingly captivated by Italian art and architecture. This admiration, particularly in the realms of music, art, and architecture, left a lasting imprint on the English lexicon. Moreover, many Italian words entered English as loanwords, often mediated through French. For instance, *porcelain* can be traced back to the Old Italian *porcellana*, though it reached English via Middle French (Merriam-Webster 2024).

The borrowing from Italian peaked between 1500 and 1650, coinciding with the Renaissance and the widespread admiration for Italian culture (Durkin 2014, 48). During this period, English adopted numerous terms related to the arts and daily life, such as *balcony, cupola, granite, grotto, Madonna, piazza, portico, solo,*

sonata, stanza, trill, violin, and *volcano*. Initially tied to specific domains, these words gradually became embedded in the English language, reflecting Italy's artistic prestige and the dynamic nature of linguistic borrowing.

When discussing linguistic borrowings, it is essential to recognize that the mere occasional use of a foreign word does not qualify as a true borrowing. For a term to be fully integrated into a language, it must undergo a process of conventionalization, gradually becoming familiar and widely accepted within a speech community. Only after this level of integration has been reached does a dictionary typically register the word as a borrowed term (McArthur 1998, 80).

Moreover, borrowing is not a static or final stage in the transfer of words between languages. Given the inherently dynamic nature of language, borrowed words continue to evolve, adapt, and, in some cases, fall out of use entirely. As Pinnavaia points out, linguistic changes can occur across multiple levels, including pronunciation, spelling, grammar, vocabulary, meaning, and stylistic nuances, often leading to variations between the borrowed term and its original form (Pinnavaia 2001, 23).

Pinnavaia introduces the concept of "first-degree borrowings", referring to words that have attained full lexical integration in the recipient language. These borrowings retain significant aspects of their original linguistic structure—phonetic, orthographic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic—while also undergoing adaptations to align with the linguistic patterns of the borrowing language (ibid. 71–72). Examples of such borrowings from Italian include *chiaroscuro*, *sfumato*, and *grotesque*, all of which have become fundamental terms in art discourse. Additionally, *cartoon* (from *cartone*, referring to a preparatory drawing for a fresco) and *studio* (originally meaning an artist's workshop) illustrate how borrowed elements integrate into the host language.

These fully assimilated borrowings—sometimes referred to as "genuine loanwords"—can be further categorized into four distinct types: loanwords, loan translations, loanblends, and semantic loans (ibid 70). Loanwords retain both the form and meaning of the original, as seen in *fresco* and *intarsia*. Loan translations, on the other hand, convey the meaning of the foreign word using native language equivalents, as in *still life* (a calque of *natura morta*). Loanblends involve a combination of direct borrowing and partial translation, such as *pastel drawing* (*pastello* + English) or *mosaic tile* (*mosaico* + English). Finally, semantic loans occur when a language adopts a foreign meaning without incorporating the original meaning of the word itself, as exemplified by *studio*, which shifted from referring specifically to an artist's workspace to a more general creative environment.

3. EXAMINING BORROWINGS IN JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY

Our research examines the presence and treatment of loanwords in Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), which remained the leading English dictionary until the Oxford English Dictionary was released in

the early 20th century. Albeit not the first English dictionary, Johnson's work was groundbreaking for its comprehensiveness, defining over 42,773 words and technical terms, as well as providing 140,871 definitions. It also set a new standard by including around 114,000 literary quotations from famous authors like Shakespeare (Crystal & Crystal 2013, 271). These features helped define the role of a dictionary, making Johnson's work not just a linguistic tool but a cultural artifact that continues to influence lexicography today.

Johnson's approach to definitions shows his commitment to what Hitchings terms "philosophical lexicography". Rather than simply cataloging words, Johnson's definitions reflect a deeper philosophical engagement with language, while maintaining technical precision (Hitchings 2005, 133). One of Johnson's key contributions was his systematic effort to trace the etymology and origins of words. His dictionary aimed not only to define words but also to provide a historical perspective on language development, including the influence of other languages on English. This focus is reflected in the full title of his dictionary: *A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which the Words Are Deduced from Their Originals, and Illustrated in Their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers: To Which Are Prefixed a History of the Language, and an English Grammar*.

Our interest in this corpus is further motivated by Johnson's well-documented skepticism toward the arts[1]. We hypothesize that if Johnson's *Dictionary* includes a significant number of loanwords related to the arts, this would indicate that such terms were already widely used and, consequently, featured in contemporary literature. By analyzing these borrowings, we aim to explore the extent to which Italian-derived art terminology had permeated the English lexicon by the mid-18th century.

Moreover, the presence of art terminology in Johnson's corpus reflects a broader linguistic phenomenon: the fluid interaction between specialized and general vocabulary. In general, art terminology actively interacts with terms from other spheres of scientific knowledge and is also often used in general literary language. For this reason, the structure and boundaries of this sort of terminology system tend to be unstable.

The term *determinologization* refers to the shift of terminology from a Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) to a Language for General Purposes (LGP), influencing the meaning and usage of terms (Meyer & Mackintosh 2000; Ledouble 2024). Unlike popularization, which is a deliberate process of making scientific knowledge accessible to the general public, determinologization is typically an unconscious phenomenon. It occurs as specialized terms circulate beyond their original fields, often due to growing public interest in those domains (Condamines & Picton 2014, 168).

1 While Johnson often expressed disdain for artistic endeavors, some scholars suggest that this stance may have been a form of Socratic pretense designed to provoke intellectual debate (Brownell 1989).

The wide use of art terms outside their original system may lead to the gradual loss of their terminological precision. However, determinologization is often partial, as the specialized meaning can persist alongside its broader, more generalized use.

In our research, we examined the process of determinologization in the art-related loanwords recorded in Johnson's *Dictionary*. By tracing the early stages of this process, we sought to identify cases where art terms had already begun transitioning into broader usage or were likely to do so in subsequent periods. Our predictions were based on Johnson's examples, which in some cases already show the terms being used in more general or metaphorical senses beyond their original technical meaning.

4. KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we present the key findings from our analysis of Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). Our focus is on the treatment of Italian-derived art terminology and the role of determinologization in the development of these terms within the English language. By examining certain loanwords and their usage, we aim to shed light on the early stages of their shift from specialized art terms to more general vocabulary.

4.1. The Phonological and Orthographical Aspects

Our analysis begins with an examination of the phonological and orthographical characteristics of Italian-derived art terms in Johnson's *Dictionary*. This section explores how these loanwords were adapted to fit the phonological and spelling conventions of 18th-century English by looking at the patterns of modification and standardization that influenced the spelling and pronunciation of these terms.

Italian borrowings in English typically retain a pronunciation closer to their original forms when compared to French loans. Some words, such as *piazza* and *dentelli*, were adopted with minimal phonological adaptation. Others, like *vista* and *dilettante*, were modified to fit the English phonological system, with changes such as the replacement of final vowels with an /ə/ or an /i/ sound.

Although the length of stressed vowels is generally preserved, certain words, like *balcony*, have undergone changes in pronunciation over time. For instance, in the word *balcony*, the second syllable was originally stressed in English, as noted in Johnson's Dictionary (*balco'ny*), but this shifted in the 19th century (Harper, n.d.)

In addition to phonological shifts, some loanwords have undergone orthographic modifications influenced by English phonetics. These adaptations include the elimination of final vowels when words were phonetically remodeled to fit the English sound system—examples include *baldachin* (from *baldachino*),

crimosin (from *crimosino*), *portal* (from *portale*) and *parapet* (from *parapetto*). Other changes involve the substitution of letters, as in *relievo* (from *rilievo*). These alterations reflect the natural evolution of borrowed terms, shaped by the interplay between the phonological and orthographic systems of the source and recipient languages.

4.2. Johnson's Dictionary: Presence and Absence of Art-Related Italianisms

In this part of our analysis, we focus on the Italian loanwords related to the arts that are present in Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). Our research identified 38 Italian terms associated with the arts. However, we also observed the absence of several well-known art-related terms that were already in use in English by the mid-18th century.

Understandably, certain terms that had not yet gained widespread usage by the time Johnson's dictionary was published were absent, such as *archivolt* (first known use in 1723[2]), *terra-cotta* (1722) and *loggia* (1742). Additionally, many other art-related terms were introduced into English only after the publication of Johnson's dictionary, including *caricature* (1771), *impasto* (1784) and *graffito* (1851).

What we found particularly curious was the omission of terms that had already been in use for some time, such as *belvedere* (1549), *madonna* (1589), *pietà* (1640s), and *chiaroscuro* (1686). This discrepancy raises questions about the criteria Johnson applied in selecting terms for inclusion. It suggests that Johnson may have prioritized words based on their prevalence in literary sources or general usage over specialized terminology, potentially reflecting the linguistic norms and cultural influences of his time. Consequently, the absence of these established art terms indicates that Italian art terminology had not yet been fully integrated into the English lexicon by the mid-18th century, highlighting the evolving nature of language and the selective process of lexicographical documentation.

4.3. Linguistic Categories and Thematic Distribution of Art-Related Italianisms

This section presents an in-depth analysis of the linguistic categories and thematic distribution of the 38 Italian loanwords related to the arts found in Johnson's *Dictionary.* Our research reveals that the majority of these terms are nouns, with only five verbs and four adjectives included, highlighting the predominance of objects and concepts over actions and descriptive qualities in the incorporation of Italian art terminology into English. Interestingly, fourteen of these terms are first-degree borrowings, as defined by Pinnavaia, meaning

2 The first recorded appearances of the terms are sourced from Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, accessed November 18, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/research.

they have been fully integrated into English, retaining core elements of their original form while adapting to the linguistic norms of English. These terms showcase the early stages of linguistic exchange between Italian and English in the context of the arts, where the influence of Italian cultural and artistic movements was particularly strong.

Some of these terms, as discussed earlier, have undergone orthographic adaptations to comply with the rules of the English sound system. These adaptations reflect the need to adjust the spelling of Italian terms to align with English phonetics and orthographic conventions, as seen in examples like *baldachin* (from *baldachino*), *crimosin* (from *crimosino*), and *portal* (from *portale*). These alterations are part of a natural process where borrowed terms evolve to fit the phonological and orthographical systems of the recipient language.

In terms of thematic distribution, nearly half (47.36%) of the 38 terms are related to architecture, reflecting the strong influence of Italian architectural styles and terminology in England during the 18th century. Italian art and architecture were particularly admired and imitated during this period (Motolese 2012: 13), which is likely why this thematic category is so heavily represented. A further 28.94% of the terms are associated with painting, underlining the importance of visual arts in the exchange between Italian and English cultures. The remaining terms cover sculpture, graphics, and applied arts, though in fewer instances, showing a slightly more limited cross-cultural exchange in these fields at the time.

Moreover, twelve of these terms are presented as technical entries in Johnson's Dictionary, with definitions sourced from contemporary technical literature or specialized dictionaries. These entries, unlike more general terms in the dictionary, reflect the specialized nature of the vocabulary associated with the arts. Additionally, these entries sometimes omit the literary examples Johnson typically included for other words, emphasizing their technical and non-literary usage. For instance, words like *baldachin*, *bass-relief*, *rotundo*, *relievo*, and *stucco* are defined with a focus on their artistic or architectural function, rather than through illustrative examples drawn from literature or everyday life. This may suggest that Johnson recognized the growing role of technical language within the arts, particularly in relation to the increasing influence of Italian artistic traditions on English-speaking countries. However, it is also possible that these terms were included because they were in active use at the time, without necessarily reflecting a more conscious awareness of the broader cultural exchange between Italy and England. This not only highlights the range of Italian art-related vocabulary incorporated into English but also suggests the complex processes of language adaptation and cultural exchange occurring during this period. The incorporation of these terms into English reflects the fluidity of linguistic and cultural borders, hinting at a broader European intellectual and artistic exchange, though this may also have been an incidental outcome of the increasing global interconnectedness of the time.

4.4. Determinologization of Italian Art Terms in Johnson's Dictionary

The term *determinologization* refers to the process by which specialized terms transition from technical or niche usage into more generalized, everyday language. In our analysis of Italian loanwords in Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), we observed that many art-related terms had already undergone this shift by the time of its publication. As expected, determinologization is often partial, with the specialized meaning of these terms sometimes persisting alongside their broader, more generalized usage.

One clear example of this process is seen in the term *vault*. Originally an architectural term referring to an arched structure or ceiling, *vault* had already begun to take on a more general meaning by the time Johnson's dictionary was published. While the architectural meaning remained in use, it was also being applied in everyday contexts, for example, when referring to a storage space, like a bank vault. This exemplifies how specialized terms move from technical jargon to broader usage while maintaining some of their original sense.

In addition to *vault*, several other Italian art terms in Johnson's dictionary show signs of having been determinologized by the mid-18th century. For example, *studio* initially referred to an artist's workspace or, in Italian, the act of studying. By Johnson's time, it had broadened to mean any place of work or learning. Another example is *marble*. The prominence of Italian marble in art and sculpture contributed to the broader usage of the term, so that by Johnson's time, marble had started referring not only to the stone itself but also to works made from it

These examples illustrate the early stages of determinologization, where terms began to be used in broader contexts outside their original, specialized fields. Furthermore, several other terms in Johnson's dictionary show evidence of this process:

- **Fresco**: Originally referring to a specific painting technique, *fresco* had become widely understood in English by the 18th century, marking its transition to more general usage.
- **Piazza**: Originally describing a public square or marketplace, *piazza* was increasingly used in English to refer to similar open spaces, which reflects its broader application.
- **Balustrade**: Coming from the Italian *balaustrata*, this architectural term had become widely used in English by the 18th century to describe railings supported by balusters.
- **Cameo**: While originally referring to a specific method of carving, *cameo* had already become a more general term in English for any small, intricately carved decoration.
- **Relievo**: From Italian rilievo, referring to a sculptural technique, this term had already started being used more broadly in English by Johnson's time, often referring to any raised design, not just in sculpture but also in art and decoration.

These examples highlight how Italian art-related terms began to transition from specialized vocabulary in the arts to terms that were commonly used in general English by the mid-18th century. As these words moved from the confines of specific artistic and architectural contexts to broader usage, they began to acquire meanings that extended beyond their original, technical senses. This shift reflects the increasing influence of Italian culture on English-speaking society, particularly in the realms of art and architecture. Determinologization, though often partial, played a key role in broadening the reach of these terms and integrating them into everyday language. As the boundaries between specialized and general vocabulary began to blur, these terms became more accessible to the general public, and their usage expanded into new areas. By the time of Johnson's dictionary, many of these words had evolved beyond their original artistic contexts and were understood in a variety of different ways, illustrating the dynamic nature of language and its ability to adapt to changing cultural and social influences.

Although it was not the primary focus of our research, we also found various examples of music-related terms in Johnson's dictionary (*cadenza, allegro, solo* etc.) that followed similar processes of determinologization, further demonstrating the broader impact of Italian vocabulary on English.

5. CONCLUSION – RESEARCH BENEFITS

Our research into the presence and treatment of Italian-derived art terminology in Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) sheds light on the early stages of the integration of specialized vocabulary into the broader English lexicon. By examining Johnson's meticulous approach to etymology, we discovered that many Italian art terms, while initially specialized, had already undergone a process of determinologization by the time of the publication of the dictionary.

Johnson's dictionary, a monumental work that sought to capture the vastness of the English language, reflects not only the linguistic development of the time but also the broader cultural exchange between Italy and England, particularly in the field of arts. The inclusion of Italianisms related to art demonstrates the profound influence of Italian artistic traditions on English culture during the 18th century. These terms, such as *studio*, *grotto*, *fresco*, *piazza*, and *balustrade*, had shifted from specialized art vocabulary to more generalized usage, signaling a transition from their technical origins to terms used in everyday language.

Our findings highlight that determinologization is often a partial process. While many of the terms retained their specialized meanings, their broader usage in general language was already evident in Johnson's time. The term *vault*, (OED, 2024) for example, illustrates how architectural jargon was able to evolve into a more general term, applicable not just to architecture but to everyday contexts, like secure storage. Similarly, terms like *marble* and *cameo*, which were

originally Italian art terms, had moved beyond their specific contexts to become common descriptors in English.

By examining the role of determinologization in the evolution of these art-related loanwords, we hope to have given a minor contribution to a deeper understanding of how language adapts and transforms over time. The shift from specialized art terms to more generalized vocabulary exemplifies the dynamic interaction between language, culture, and society, and underscores the importance of Italian artistic influence on the English language. Johnson's *Dictionary* not only captures the lexicon of his time but also provides a glimpse into the broader cultural and linguistic shifts that were occurring as English was increasingly being enriched by terms from other languages, particularly Italian, reflecting the flourishing of the arts during the period.

In conclusion, this study illustrates the fluid nature of language and the importance of lexicography in documenting the changes that shape our vocabulary. The determinologization of art-related Italianisms in Johnson's *Dictionary* marks an important moment in the evolution of English, demonstrating how specialized terms can transcend their original contexts and become integral parts of the broader linguistic landscape.

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TERMINI ARTISTICI ITALIANI NEL DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (1755) DI SAMUEL JOHNSON: IL PROCESSO DI DETERMINOLOGIZZAZIONE

Riassunto

L'influenza della terminologia artistica italiana, che persiste oggi nella maggior parte delle lingue europee, ha cominciato a permeare l'inglese nel sedicesimo secolo. Termini come *intaglio*, *stucco* e *portico*, presi in prestito dalla ricca tradizione artistica italiana, hanno arricchito il lessico inglese. Tuttavia, un'analisi più approfondita delle citazioni letterarie utilizzate da Samuel Johnson per illustrare questi termini potrebbe rivelare una sottile trasformazione nei loro significati. Alcuni di questi termini hanno subito un processo di determinologizzazione, in cui i loro significati originali, specializzati, sono diventati meno precisi, sfocati o più ambigui. Questo articolo si propone di identificare e analizzare tali termini nel dizionario di Johnson per stabilire se il processo di determinologizzazione sia avvenuto. I risultati preliminari dell'analisi suggeriscono che, nel diciottesimo secolo, quando Johnson compilò il suo dizionario, alcuni di questi termini fossero già percepiti come unità lessicali appartenenti non solo a domini disciplinari specifici, ma anche al registro elevato della lingua inglese. Questa transizione è particolarmente evidente nei settori dell'arte e dell'architettura, che da lungo tempo affascinano non solo gli esperti, ma anche i laici, suscitando il desiderio di una comprensione più profonda e di un apprezzamento della creatività umana e delle sue realizzazioni.

Parole chiave: terminologia artistica italiana, inglese, significato, determinologizzazione, lessicografia storica.