

# Mediterranean Heritage in Transit



# Mediterranean Heritage in Transit:

*(Mis-)Representations  
via English*

Edited by

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# INTRODUCTION

It is mainly within and around Mediterranean itineraries that the European Union (EU) seeks its in/tangible cultural heritage. The EU aims to develop reflective societies, where knowledge can be created in connection with peoples' heritage, in keeping with its strategic research agenda.<sup>1</sup> In the same years as the *McDonaldization/Starbuckization* of society (Ritzer 1993; 2008), aspects of Mediterranean cultures have both survived and flourished beyond their natural boundaries, frequently acquiring new connotations/meanings through the medium of communication in English. Through diverse awareness-raising initiatives, it encourages peoples to repossess and safeguard their own unique, 'indigenous' cultures. The focus is on 'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces [...] – that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage'<sup>2</sup>.

In the arena of contemporary cultural heritage, this volume brings together many different strands of analysis, helping to shed light on the complex and multifaceted phenomena that constitute the vibrant socio-semiotic landscape of the Mediterranean. The latter, in fact, can be seen both as the possible unifying referent of diverse physical and anthropic environments and as a metonymic embodiment of contemporary social and lingua-cultural paradigm shifts. Such issues have been investigated across a wide range of (transdisciplinary) theoretical analytical frameworks, and also from an educational perspective. *Mediterranean Heritage in transit – (mis)representations via English* views this vibrant scenario from a dynamic cross-cultural perspective, and investigates the domains of identities and stereotypes, advertising, films, myths and festivals, landscapes, fluid knowledge and new technologies, culture-bound terms, migrating words and food.

More specifically, the first four chapters revolve around issues of intra- and inter-group identities, as related to itineraries of more recent or historicized migrations, and how such multifaceted identities are variously

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jpi-culturalheritage.eu/joint-call/2014>.

<sup>2</sup> Euromed Heritage Programme IV, (2008-2012); UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention (2003).

re-shaped by/through the media, and via the medium of English (Abbamonte 2010). Increasingly, English serves as the global means of linguistic communication in traditional and new media, thus becoming free from its geographic boundaries (Cavaliere 2015; Cagliero, Jenkins 2010, 10-11).<sup>3</sup>

At the intersection of Italian and North American lingua-cultural frameworks, in a dynamic interplay of symbols and clichés, the complex issue of national identities and misrepresentation via English is central in the chapter FOOD, FAMILY AND FEMALES: (SOUTHERN) ITALY IN U.S. ADVERTISING by Lucia Abbamonte and Flavia Cavaliere. Their chapter focuses on US TV commercials of Italian food products, or ‘Italian-sounding’ food and shows how, while pursuing the pragmatic goals of advertising goods, visual media often construct and broadcast unbalanced portrayals. More specifically, Americans of Italian heritage are frequently represented through anachronistic behavioural models, such as an ethnocentric sense of family, fixation on food, and mafia. Indeed, nation-based stereotypes are typically re-mediated through inter/intra-textual references in a process of re-semiotization that appears to be a fundamental component of advertising strategies, which are illustrated and commented on by the authors according to their relevance for the analysis. Drawing on two diachronically selected sub-corpora of US TV commercials (1980-1999 and 2000-2010), the analysis shows how Italian American women were firstly depicted either as caring mothers and good cooks, or overweight grandmothers wearing housecoats or aprons. In the 1980-1999 corpus, the

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<sup>3</sup> R. Cagliero and J. Jenkins (eds) 2010. *Discourses, Communities, and Global Englishes*. Bern: Peter Lang; L. Abbamonte 2010. ELF as the Medium in the Psychoanalytic Discourse Community: Science and International Dissemination, edited by R. Cagliero and J. Jenkins (2010 *op. cit.*). See also: F. Cavaliere 2015. ‘Globalizzazione, Americanizzazione ed Inglese come lingua franca’. *Logos* 10:153-159; J. Jenkins 2013. *English as a Lingua Franca in the International University. The politics of academic English language policy*. London: Routledge; S. Sweeney 2013. ‘The culture of International English’. Cambridge University Press. Retrievable at: [http://peo.cambridge.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2:simon-sweeney-questions-the-implications-of-internationalisation-and-asks-some-searching-questions-of-the-elt-profession](http://peo.cambridge.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2:simon-sweeney-questions-the-implications-of-internationalisation-and-asks-some-searching-questions-of-the-elt-profession); D. Crystal 2012. *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: CUP; A. De Houwer et al. (eds) 2011. *English in Europe today: sociocultural and educational perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins; R. McCrum 2011. *Globish: How the English Language Became the World’s Language*. New York: Viking; B. Seidlhofer 2011. *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford: OUP; R. Facchinetti, D. Crystal, and B. Seidlhofer (eds) 2010. *From International to Local English – And Back Again*. Bern: Peter Lang.



typically Italian deli-food fixation is displayed in the setting of welcoming kitchens, and the sense of family appears to be mostly ethnocentric/clannish. Such re-contextualization of the 'Italian' social/ethnic group in the US commercial semiosphere was mainly carried out through the advertising practices of building multimodal metaphors which could, in turn, produce comic, grotesque, and even paradoxical effects. In the pragmatic dimension of TV commercials, 'Italian national identity', with its culture-laden elements pertaining to the preparation and consumption of healthy, fresh, Mediterranean food was transferred beyond its socio-cultural cradle and re-shaped in a persuasive, if inaccurate, meta-fictional setting. In such a setting, the womanly stereotype was reinforced by the ethnic stereotype, thus creating the commodification of the 'Italian caring, nurturing mamma' and Womanly Homemaker in a patriarchal society. In those years, up to the late 1990s, time spent cooking and serving the family was still represented as a positive value for women.

In more recent times, Italianicity stereotypes have been re-shaped to meet and reinforce the perceptual expectations of the audience, according to the characteristics of the goods advertised. In the examples from 2000 onwards, as the multimodal analysis of the visual/verbal pictorial patterns of the language/s of the TV commercials highlights, a significant evolution of the 'typically Italian' Food, Family & Females (FFF) stereotypes can be observed. In particular, the 'aproned' housewife is replaced with the classy male cook (or chef), thus representing the new reverse myth of 'man as a helpmate to woman'. The time spent enjoying 'traditionally prepared' food has become the new value. These more recent stereotypes still revolve around the enjoyment of food as the central point of the happy lives of not exclusively idealised families, but also couples and other kinds of (social) groups – in a more leisured and glamorous dimension.

Maria Grazia Sindoni in 'YOU WANNA PIECE O' ME?' – A SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEY ON THE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF ITALIAN AMERICANS also addresses the construction and development of cultural identities, where the preservation of the system of values of the culture of origin in a different context is a major focus of attention. Apparently, new values and ways of life tend to weaken links with the source culture and strengthen them with the receiving culture. This process tends to modify the language and symbols of identity that have been imported from the source culture, to a significant extent. Sindoni highlights how 'networked' identities in bilingual individuals are likely to emerge, encouraging creative uses of language and alternative constructions of the self, as ethnicities take on new connotations according to the context in which they are found. In her chapter, the effects of such

modifications in the Italian-American context of the ‘second’ and ‘third generation’ are examined from a socio-linguistic perspective, in order to address specific research questions about Italian Americans’ perceptions of Italian culture and language – the latter, to some extent, being shaped by the contact of the two different cultures – and the contribution that the media gives to the somewhat vague idea of Italianness.

To address such questions, Sindoni selected a random sample of Italian-American informants, subscribers of Italian-American Facebook groups, whose first language is American English. Her investigation followed a pragmatic approach, and informants were invited to think about identity definitions through the recollection of specific speech acts (mainly idioms, proverbs, swear words and terms of endearment) that they were able to recall from their daily experience. Their answers were mostly related to negative stereotyping of Italian culture and identity. Most examples recalled had associations with the worst and most stereotyped representations of Italy in the United States, shaping a monolithic representation of Italian Americans as mainly thriving in illegal activities. Hence, the strong attachment to the language and culture of their origins that was assumed in this sample of informants conflicts with their somewhat stereotyped representation of their group in both intra- and inter-group dynamics. Sindoni’s data show how ethnic stereotypes tend to be perpetuated and not fully rejected, which is also true in unexpected contexts, such as the rampant militancy found in ethnically aware individuals.

From a contiguous perspective, the mis-representation of Italian-American identities is also investigated in *THE SOPRANOS’ MOBSPEAK: STEREOTYPING ITALIAN AMERICAN CULTURE* by Amelia R. Burns. The author starts from the consideration that Italian Americans have been unjustly but effectively stereotyped by the U.S. entertainment industry, which almost exclusively depicted them as either gangsters, or losers, or both. A notable example is the successful mafia-themed TV series ‘The Sopranos’. This series has had a great impact on the American audience in the last decade and, at the same time, has raised many questions about its derogatory stereotyping of Italian Americans in the media, through its coarse language and violent scenes. Burns’ corpus-based study (comprising the English subtitles of the first season of this TV show) aims at analyzing the peculiar language used in ‘The Sopranos’: a mixture of Italian(isms) and English loanwords, slang and Mafia jargon.

By identifying the main characteristics of the Italian American sub-language, this chapter manages to outline the lingua-cultural misrepresentation of Italian Americans sketched out in the series. Indeed, ‘The

Sopranos' depicts the typecast of the 'typical' Italian American male, as uneducated, violent and criminal, with a strong passion for food, confined within the net of his own family, to which he is loyal to death, unless betrayed. His direct, crude and vulgar language appears instrumental to convey his power through words. Burns' investigation shows how this derogatory re-shaping of an otherwise rich and multifaceted cultural heritage, also performed through lexical re-semanticization and other linguistic strategies, has turned trite stereotypes into a sub-cultural norm.

Douglas Ponton's chapter addresses issues of identity formation/evolution, questioning the impact of migration on the sense of self and community found among Sicilian immigrants into the US. In *SAINT JOSEPH'S FEAST, TEXAS STYLE – A TRADITIONAL SICILIAN IDENTITY IN MODERN TIMES*, Ponton is concerned with the contribution made, by indexes of traditional Sicilian identity, to second and third generation immigrants from Sicily to Bryan, Texas. In this community, the ancient ritual of 'the altar of Saint Joseph' (*la tavola di San Giuseppe*) is carried on, using details taken with them by the immigrants when they left the Poggioreale area, in western Sicily, in the early twentieth century. Observance of the festival has become an important marker of personal and collective identity for the members of this American community, who see themselves as continuing a cultural and religious tradition with strong family associations. The annual festival in Bryan is the subject of a documentary by anthropologist Circe Sturm and cultural historian Randolph Lewis, from the University of Austin, Texas. The viewer of the film may be struck by a sense of temporal and cultural dislocation of the event with its surrounding social context. The film raises delicate questions about cultural integration, which are standards of anthropological investigation in this area. How far, for example, is it possible or desirable for immigrants to absorb the cultural practices of the host nation? How far does adherence to social rituals, or linguistic and cultural patterns brought with the immigrant from the mother country impede successful integration? Observance of the altar of Saint Joseph is one such social practice that enacts group values, and thereby underscores a sense of personal and collective identity. The St. Joseph's altar in Texas may tie the participants, not even to modern Sicily, but to patterns of language and social ritual that were anachronistic when their ancestors emigrated.

The chapter explores these issues, firstly by an examination of the ritual as currently practiced in modern day Sicily, comparing it with historical accounts of the festivity, then through interviews with some of the participants in the Bryan festival. Their evaluative language, both in the film itself and in the ethnographic interviews, is explored using the

Appraisal Framework (Martin and White 2005). Not only is Sicily a focus for their identity work, but an identity for the island itself will be seen to emerge.

The following three papers explore the language of tourism in diverse multimodal representations. The authors illustrate the various textualization of the tourists' experiences in Mediterranean destinations, mainly expressed through the social media, and representing the shared social imaginary to some extent. The papers also investigate how, in tourist (e-)communication, information and promotion are skillfully shaped so as to evoke an attractive symbolic dimension.

In 'JUST AS I IMAGINED ...': A MULTIMODAL INVESTIGATION OF SICILIAN HERITAGE IN TRAVEL WEBSITES by Mariavita Cambria, this island is again the focus of attention, as represented through the lens of contemporary webwired travel writers. Comments and posts sent to travel websites are both a common way of getting information about the places people wish to visit and, at the same time, a mirror of the typical representations of those places in our reflective societies. From a multimodal discourse analysis perspective, Cambria highlights how websites such as Trip Advisor encompass several (mini)genres sharing common patterns and features with semiotic resources, working together in the meaning making process.

By adopting a blended multimodal corpus-based approach, she investigates key collocates and concordances of multiple keywords to examine how collocations in the representation of some of the most attractive places of Sicilian cultural heritage have changed over the years (from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century) and across different media (traditional travel writing and webgenres). The data are interpreted with reference to the wider notion that such interactive representations are the result of the dominant social imaginary to a varying extent – an imaginary that significantly contributes to the creation of the concept of cultural heritage.

The main purpose of Daniela Francesca Virdis' investigation, MEDITERRANEAN LANDSCAPES AS HERITAGE – AN ECOSTYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF A SARDINIAN TOURISM WEBSITE, is to identify the stylistic strategies of the language of tourism, which are deployed in the portal *SardegnaTurismo*. Her methodological approach relies mainly on the new discipline of *ecostylistics*. Through this lens, Virdis highlights how the 'Interests' sub-sections represent the Mediterranean landscapes on the island not only as natural scenery, but also, and primarily, as one of the most distinctive and remarkable features of its cultural heritage. More precisely, an explicit connection is made between the physical Mediterranean environment on

the one hand, and regional identity and ethnic culture (art, thought, traditional practices, and way of life) of the islanders on the other. The latter are depicted as having been shaped by that specific environment. More specifically, this chapter focuses on the semantic, syntactic and discursive devices utilised to positively evaluate Sardinia's unique, hybrid 'cultural' scenery and to present it as such to the English-speaking and international tourist.

In Elisabetta Zurru's chapter, *EXPLORING THE ONLINE ADVERTISING OF THE MALTESE ARCHIPELAGO'S HERITAGE THROUGH ECOSTYLISTICS*, it is argued that a country's official tourism website can become the ideal means for conveying certain 'representational politics', whose aim is to positively showcase the country, for promotional reasons. If the selection of information to share is the first step in this 'representational process', a second, fundamental step is constituted by the distribution of the information itself. Indeed, the organisation of a website into homepage and linked pages, main sections and sub sections, and the exploitation of such tools as direct links and/or the juxtaposition of related articles, suggest both the hierarchical relations existing between the information contained in the same section and the relations of interdependence existing between the information contained in different yet related sections. Thirdly, the linguistic choices characterising the textual aspect of a tourism website constitute, together with the visual language typically used in websites, deliberate choices meant to attract and persuade the reader/tourist, to inspire him/her by the representation of the country offered in the web portal.

Given this premise, the aim of Zurru's article is to carry out a linguistic investigation of the official tourism website of the Maltese archipelago. Besides providing the tourist with practical information, the website focuses extensively on the identity of the islands as Mediterranean. Such identity is constantly referred to through both distributional – direct links and related articles – and linguistic references to the historical and cultural heritage of the archipelago, which 'lies virtually at the centre of the Mediterranean' and whose climate is 'typical of the Mediterranean'. In particular, the first subsection of the first main section 'What to see & do' bears the title 'Culture and Heritage' and a number of links focus on the description of the historical and cultural development of the places listed, rather than the geographical characteristics of the landscape. As we might expect, the subsection 'History' provides tourists with an extremely detailed account of the historical development of the archipelago, from 5200 BC to the 21st century, further strengthening the idea of an ancient land 'lying virtually at the centre of the Mediterranean', rich in history and

culture. The theoretical and methodological paradigms of stylistics and ecostylistics were used to identify the linguistic and textual strategies utilised to represent the Maltese cultural and historical heritage as ‘truly Mediterranean’.

The chapter by Anna Franca Plastina, APPRECIATING THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET: POPULARIZING NUTRITIONAL DISCOURSE ONLINE, addresses issues of use and re-use of a food-related cultural heritage. Indeed, the Mediterranean diet was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010 as follows: ‘the Mediterranean diet (from the Greek *diaita*, or way of life) constitutes a set of skills, knowledge, practices and traditions ranging from the landscape to the table. [...It is] characterized by a nutritional model that has remained constant over time and space [...] in the Mediterranean communities of which Soria in Spain, Koroni in Greece, the Cilento in Italy and Chefchaouen in Morocco are examples’ (Unesco, 2012: 20). As Plastina illustrates, nutritional discourse is relatively new, given that nutrition emerged as a science only in the early 20th century, or the ‘vitamin era’, and, in particular, the socio-cultural and scientific prestige of the Mediterranean diet rapidly grew from 1975 onwards, when the real pioneer of modern nutrition research, Ancel Keys, coined the definition of *Mediterranean Diet* and promoted its benefits worldwide. The American physiologist and epidemiologist’s interest in the Mediterranean Diet focused on the association between this eating style and protection against several chronic degenerative diseases and disorders. The Mediterranean Diet reflects food patterns typical of Crete, much of the rest of Greece, and southern Italy in the early 1960s. Its traditional dietary model was popularised as a Food Pyramid by Oldways Preservation and Exchange Trust in 1994, with the aim of providing a nutrition education tool for the general public and scientific community.

Plastina’s study focuses on the newly emerging nutritional discourse practices, with particular emphasis on the language of appreciation of the Mediterranean Diet in online discussion forums in English. A corpus of threads discussing the Mediterranean Diet was collected from online forums and analysed in terms of the three subtypes of appreciation: reaction, composition and valuation pertaining to the Appraisal Framework (Martin & White, 2005). In juxtaposing positive and negative discursive features, the study explores the current status of appreciation of the Mediterranean Diet as a global cultural heritage.

A bridge over the Mediterranean sea, suspended between East and West, Turkey reflects the coexistence of an old national heritage and new cultural models, as Maria Cristina Aiezza illustrates in her study EUNITED

IN DIVERSITY: TURKISH WOMEN BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY. Turkey is still a candidate for accession to the European Union. The country is the object of a media campaign that aims to testify the progress made in the adaptation to European standards. The Europeanization of Turkey is also enacted by means of the discursive construction of a European Turkish woman, recognizing its importance among the priorities of the EU's social policies.

This chapter focuses on the videos, 'Turkish women – Between tradition and modernity' (released in 2005 by the European Commission Audiovisual Service on the occasion of Turkey's admission to negotiations for accession), 'Focus on Southeast Europe: Turkey – Gender Equality' (2009), and compares them with more recent promotional audiovisual material that appeared in the section 'Enlargement Policy' of the EUROPA website ([www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu)), which is specifically dedicated to EU promotional discourse.

Based on a multimodal critical discourse analysis approach, Aiezza's multifaceted investigation examines the linguistic and semiotic strategies (Wodak, Chilton 2007) enacted by the EU for this campaign. In particular, her analysis reveals how visual and textual choices (such as framing of shots, lexicon, modality and narratives - Kress, van Leeuwen 2006), depicting Turkey through the lens of Western values, can contribute to drawing the country closer to the West.

The study discusses which aspects and values of the Mediterranean culture are stressed and which are downplayed in the representation of Turkish women, and how their voices are exploited to narrate themes other than the female condition (Schiffrin, Tannen, Hamilton 2001). The progress of the whole country is thus propagandized in various economic and social areas, all for the purpose of consensus formation about enlargement policies.

Situated at the crux of East and West, where Islam meets Christianity, Asia meets Europe, and history faces the new, contrasting tendencies and thrusts of our fast-evolving communities, Istanbul is a cosmopolitan and Mediterranean symbolic city *par excellence*. Stefania Tondo's study, *BEBEK OF THE BOSPHORUS – A CHILDREN'S STORY, OR A CROSS-CULTURAL JOURNEY?*, revolves around the fascination of multicultural encounters. Written in English by the American Wylla Waters, and illustrated by Betül Akzambaklar, *Bebek of the Bosphorus: A Children's Story* (2008) has a long historical connection with Istanbul. Tondo explains how this charming story, published by Çitlembik/Nettleberry, may be read both as a vehicle for the transportation of local culture across the world and in the g/local perspective that editorial enterprises of this kind generally require.

Bebek, the youngest member of a family of ferryboats that lives on the Istanbul Bosphorus, is never taken seriously because she is so young. However, one day, when a cruel wizard suddenly hits Istanbul and its bridges are closed, Bebek feels bored and left out no longer, and works overtime with her family to transport stranded passengers home across the waters of the Bosphorus.

The appealing story and the attractive illustrations introduce readers around the globe to life in Istanbul. The book presents the multifaceted Istanbul culture and, in its journey across the world of Children's Literature, mirrors the travels of its protagonist Bebek: here characters, places and themes coming from around Istanbul are rich with ideas for children's fantasy literature, and readers of all ages are involved. Turkish culture and landscape are given new life and meaning through the medium of literary communication for children in English, and through the mediation of the adult world involved in spreading and sharing cross-cultural children's literature.

Given the variety of perspectives and methodological approaches adopted by the authors in investigating their specific topics, revolving around representations of Mediterranean heritage, this volume can offer useful insights to students and practitioners of discourse analysis. More specifically, from an educational perspective, *Mediterranean Heritage in transit – (mis)representations via English* can be used in first and second level University Degrees in Foreign Languages, Communication, Political Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies, not to mention specific courses in linguistics, multimodal studies, critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics.

The book includes worksheets for each chapter with proposed activities for university students who may be engaged in analyzing webpages, reading and producing tourist brochures, studying subtitling techniques in TV series and comparing multi-language subtitles and dubbing, or replicating experiments, such as implementing a sociolinguistic survey after the design of specific research questions. All these activities are designed to put best practices into effect by enhancing the reading and learning experience and encouraging self-study and self-evaluation in keeping with the theoretical strands proposed in the chapters, thus incorporating research into classroom procedures. The assumption is that a sound method can be successfully reproduced in other contexts: teachers and researchers will be able to transfer their experiences to other contexts, for example by adopting the chapters' analytical frameworks, methods and contents in other social, linguistic and cultural contexts.



The volume's principle value, then, can be found in its double design: the chapters can and should be read as research papers and can be utilized both as sources for structuring activities in a range of different classes, and as materials for self-study. One rationale of the book lies in the attempt to *bring to the fore the role of English in representing the Mediterranean heritage*, although English is not defined as a Mediterranean language. It also emphasises the flexibility of the English language in (re-)shaping representations so as to address global, rather than geographically-bound audience/s. At the same time, the book attempts to bridge the gap between academic research and class practice at the university level.



## CHAPTER ONE

### FOOD, FAMILY AND FEMALES: (SOUTHERN) ITALY IN U.S. ADVERTISING

LUCIA ABBAMONTE AND FLAVIA CAVALIERE

#### **1. Introduction**

In the world of the media, which is responsible for shaping viewers' conceptions of social reality, clichéd portrayals have led to the creation of fixed 'Imagined Communities' (Anderson 1983, Kramsch 1998) that are exploited especially in the pervasive, multimodal communication of advertising. Actually, according to the 'dissociation model' (Devine 1989), the audience uncritically activates stereotypical thoughts when faced with a member of a stereotyped group. Particularly in television commercials and print ads, the perceptual expectations of the audience seem to be not only met but also reinforced – as our study will highlight. Television commercials (TVcomms) have become a significant part of the American narrative and part of the cultural landscape. Indeed, through the (commercial) media lens, the notion of 'national identities' is generated frequently through a dynamic interplay of symbols, myths, clichés, and conventional anachronistic behavioural models, which are more easily communicated. A case in point is Americans of Italian heritage who are frequently represented through anachronistic behavioural models such as an ethnocentric sense of family, a fixation on food (Cinotto 2013), and Mafia-themed scenarios (Cavaliere 2012), thus perpetuating a-priori etiquettes, which often convey derogatory meanings that can alter audience attitudes towards this minority group and their identities. More specifically, in American television food commercials, Italian American women have been depicted in the role of family cook – either as caring mothers or as overweight grandmothers – thus playing a pivotal role in a family life typically revolving around food preparation and consumption. Drawing on selected TVcomms, we investigated from a multimodal

discourse analysis perspective (van Leeuwen 2008, 2013; Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 2006) the (mis-)representation in US advertising of such Italian American women and its diachronic evolution.

More specifically, our analysis highlighted how nation-based stereotypes are re-mediated through a process of metaphoric re-semiotisation, which appears to be a successful social practice and a fundamental component of advertising strategies. The visual and verbal communication modes of these strategies were a major focus of this study.

## **2. Background – from identity to stereotype, an overview**

A comprehensive definition of ‘identity’, a key issue in research domains ranging from psychology to social sciences, lies beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, its exploitation in the language of advertising in association with national, racial, and gender issues is relevant to the aims of our investigation.

At the crossover of Italian and North American lingua-cultural frameworks, the complex issue of national identities plays a pivotal role and these identities are variously represented and advertised in media communication. As highlighted by Anderson in his seminal texts (1983; 2006), modern nations can be considered as a sort of cultural metanarrative and as an ideological and socio-cultural enclosure or space-container where people share consensual values and are held together by various factors, including the interaction between capitalism and the print media, and the development of vernacular languages-of-state.

In other terms, a country is not only represented through its geography and landscapes, arts, products, and artefacts, but also through the verbal output and receptivity of its speech community, which shares metaphors, images, and icons (Hymes 1980), and through the recurring topics or even commonplaces and truisms that frequently occur in discursive interactions. Such (mis-)representations contribute to shaping the controversial and often-discussed notion of ‘national identities’, which are not a clear cut matter. Indeed, globalisation, migration culture, and trans-national identities seem to be challenging the nation-bound concept of citizenship and linguistic nationalism, i.e. the association of one language with membership in one national community (Kramsch 1998, 72). In the contemporary world, different cultures are increasingly ‘interconnected and entangled with each other’ (Welsch 1999, 198). At the same time, in the global cultural flow, mediascapes, – i.e. both images and the electronic and print media via which cultural images are carried (Appadurai 1990;

1996) – play a fundamental role in the construction of both self-identities and national vs. foreign cultural identities.

From a psychological perspective, as they develop, human beings acquire a psychological system from which they can build internal representations of objects and events by which they can categorise; or, in other terms and to varying extents, they build ‘psychollages’ (Mancuso 2004, 307). It is by now a shared notion that such a process is enhanced through (over-)exposure to representations on a regular basis; indeed, viewers tend to absorb biased contents a-critically. From this perspective, Gerbner (1993; 2002), among others, illustrated how the media is responsible for ‘cultivating’ viewers’ conceptions of social reality. By acting as a pervasive sixth sense, the visual media often constructs and broadcasts unbalanced portrayals, which are predictably filtered through and mediated by viewers’ race, socioeconomic status, area of residence, and racial predisposition. To put it simply, the transition from ‘identity’ to ‘stereotype’ mainly consists in a process of simplification, since stereotypical representations are an effective way of simplifying and diffusing complex notions by representing marked clichéd traits. This transition may increase emotional identification, contributing to the creation of cultural boundaries between Us and Others, i.e. insiders and outsiders of one’s specific national community, also through the use of exclusive rather than inclusive language.<sup>1</sup> Such stereotypes, basically, refer back to petrified forms of ‘Common Ground knowledge’, i.e. socio-cultural knowledge underlying all (discourse) comprehension and interaction in given cultures or epistemic communities (van Dijk 2003). In advertising, such knowledge is exploited to represent a *tranche de vie* in order to make the advertised goods palatable and alluring. Overall, unbalanced portrayals and stereotypes are commonly found in advertising, since they can be easily understood and adopted/adapted, thus providing a quick way of communicating with large audiences, either by intentionally setting them up or by challenging them. The exclusive language of TVcomm sketches expose ‘narrowed’ or focused identities from a comic or grotesque perspective, pragmatically realised to impress and persuade the target audience.

In brief, as is well known, one of the most influential nationalities to have migrated in large numbers to the United States is the Italians; between 1880 and 1920, more than four million Italian immigrants arrived

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<sup>1</sup> Whereas inclusive language does not stereotype, demean, or patronise people based on gender, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or other factors, the exclusive language of advertising tends to do the very opposite, by sketching out ‘narrowed’, comic, and even grotesque identities.

in the United States, forming ‘Little Italies’ wherever they went. Bringing their food, culture, and entertainment to the nation, another large wave of Italian immigrants arrived in the country following WWII, bringing the total number today to 17,558,598.<sup>2</sup> Italian American communities have often been characterised by strong ties with family and fraternal organisations, such as the Catholic Church and certain political parties (Alba 1985).

In particular, Italian women who arrived in the US during the period of mass immigration had to cope with new and often difficult socio-economic contexts. Women of Italian immigrant families worked hard to maintain a full meal schedule for large families (Goode 1984a). Mothers, in charge of raising the children and providing family care, usually displayed great resourcefulness in reconciling their cultural traditions, which placed the priority on family, with these new circumstances (Giordano and Tamburri 2009; Bonomo and Palamidessi Moore 2011). Married women usually avoided factory work and preferred home-based work such as tailoring or running small shops, whereas unmarried women were generally employed in the garment industry as seamstresses, often in precarious working conditions.

Over the decades, job opportunities progressively expanded for Italian American women since they often had a formal education and were willing to leave the Little Italies and commute to work (Gardaphe 2004). In summary, the second half of the 20th century was a period in which Italian American women were prominent in virtually all fields and there was a growing awareness of their role and identity, as The National Organization of Italian American Women (NOIAW founded in 1980) shows.

### 3. Aims

Against this background, our study aimed to examine from a broad Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) perspective (see Methodology) how in US advertising, especially TVcomms, ethnic stereotypes create fossilised metaphors of Italian American women that can alter audience attitudes towards this group. Indeed, what happens when national identities and culture-laden elements representing them are transferred and/or depicted outside the socio-cultural cradle from which

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<sup>2</sup> J. Jerreat, 1 September 2013. ‘Where America came from’, *Daily Mail*. Retrieved at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2408591/American-ethnicity-map-shows-melting-pot-ethnicities-make-USA-today.html#ixzz3afjW5onc>

they originated? The present investigation addressed this question, and attempted to show how and to what extent these actual societal groups can be far from the fixed image of ‘advertised’ communities – which are often portrayed in an ironic, funny, grotesque, or even derogatory way.

Regardless of a multifaceted, ever-developing reality, these cultural etiquettes are perpetuated in the media, especially in TVcomms, where American women of Italian heritage are frequently represented through female anachronistic behavioural models. Indeed, through the multimodal resources of advertising, such meanings can be built that alter audience perception. Hence, an effort of the present investigation was to highlight some aspects of the dynamics and visual/verbal pictorial patterns of the language(s) of advertising (see below).

In this light, we investigated the diachronic evolution of the ‘typically Italian’ *Food, Family & Females* (FFF) stereotype over the decades. We showed how in US TVcomms of the 1980s to the 1990s, Italian American women were depicted either as caring mothers and good cooks or as ‘aproned’ grandmothers with their hair in buns, whereas in 2000-2010 US TVcomms, the foregrounding of new and more fashionable stereotypes is recognisable. These more recent stereotypes mainly revolve around the enjoyment of food as the central point of the happy lives of not exclusively idealised families, but also couples and other kinds of (social) groups – in a more leisured and glamorous dimension.

## **4. The language of ads: multiplying and refracting meanings**

### **4.1. Key theoretical notions**

Advertising, or ‘the largest, most pervasive, and most successful enterprise on the planet’ (McKenna 1999, 103), constantly impinges on our daily lives, yet we are often unaware of its more subtle forms of persuasion, or of the extent to which it manipulates our (consumer) culture (Dyer 1988) through its sophisticated use of both visual and verbal rhetoric for deliberate effects. In studying the languages of advertising, a constant effort has been made to apply the notions of rhetoric (i.e. the art of persuasion) to both texts and images, as, for example, in Scott’s *The Need for a Theory of Visual Rhetoric* (1994), which anatomised the design of an advertisement as the succession of *invention*, *arrangement*, and *delivery*. In the wide domain of research and literature on advertising and its languages – ranging from applied/applicable linguistics and (multi)media studies to experimental research on consumer response and

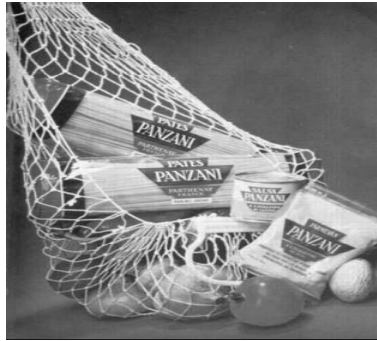
practical advice on how to make a successful advertisement – a groundbreaking contribution is to be found in *The Rhetoric Of The Image* by Roland Barthes (1964). In his 1964 essay he analysed an image used to advertise Panzani pasta to exemplify how different messages can be conveyed by a system of signs. Starting from the consideration that the word ‘image’ stems from the Latin term ‘*imitatio*’, Barthes questioned whether and to what extent images can convey meaning since they are essentially imitations. Then, in brief, he posited the need for taking into account both the linguistic message and the *denoted/connoted* values of the images, or in other terms, the *un-coded* iconic messages (what the images actually show) and the *coded* iconic messages (i.e. in Saussurean terms, the *signifieds*). Barthes illustrated how every image is polysemous and subjacent to its signifiers, along a ‘floating chain’ of signifieds, among which the reader can select some and ignore the rest. Barthes placed advertisements alongside poetry, myth, and dream. Almost all images in advertising are accompanied by *linguistic messages* which can function either as *anchorage* – (i.e. by focusing on one of the multiple meanings/interpretations of the images, thus ‘subjugating’ the freedom of the image), or as *relay* (i.e. a more equal relationship, where both text and image work together to bear the intended meaning, as, for example, in a comic strip). In the Panzani pasta advert, the role of the denoted/un-coded image is to naturalise the symbolic message, by displaying the ‘innocent’ picture of a tomato, some packets of pasta, a tin, a sachet, some tomatoes, onions, peppers, and a mushroom. Now, largely, since meaning is construed at the crossroads of the creator and consumer engagement, some shared connotations/coders shape the rhetoric of the image. In the Panzani pasta advert, whose linguistic code is the French language, additional signifieds can be found: the sign Panzani, apart from the name of the brand (denotation), gives by its assonance the additional signified of ‘Italianicity’ (connotation).<sup>3</sup> Further, the open bag letting its contents spill out over the table suggests the healthy habit of shopping for oneself and buying fresh food. Moreover, in brief, the fresh vegetables in the bag suggest a quasi-

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<sup>3</sup> ‘*Signs*, and hence *signifiers*, come from specific social places and cultural sites. The red and white check tablecloth in a restaurant [in England as in other places in Europe] is a *signifier* of “Mediterranean-ness”. The oversize peppermill waved by the waiter over my plate is a signifier of “Italian-ness”. Many signs/signifiers bring, with the *frame* of their *provenance*, additional meanings into a specific mode – whether an instrument in music – the ukulele, the mandolin; or a French accent in speech, pronouncing *maison* with a nasal vowel; or a beret as a part of my dress’. (Kress 2010, 157).



identity with the contents in the Panzani sauce, as Barthes exhaustively explained (1964).



Panzani pasta visual

Ahead of his time, Barthes' essay voiced the pervasive tendency at the end of the century towards 'mono-modality'. From the 1960s onwards, the need for crossing the boundaries and developing semiotic frameworks applicable to various modes of communications, from paintings to poetry, fashion to the cinema, advertising to music, and so on, was increasingly felt. In other terms, a particular set of narrative conventions was inevitably shifting over the years, owing to the advent of 'the pictorial turn', i.e. philosophical attention to imagination, imagery, and non-linguistic symbol systems and a setting aside of the 'assumption that language is paradigmatic for meaning' (Mitchell 1994, 12).

There was a growing awareness during this period that within a given socio-cultural domain, the 'same' meanings could be expressed in different semiotic modes. In the words of Kress and Leeuwen (2001, 1),

*For some time now, there has been, in Western culture, a distinct preference for monomodality. The most highly valued genres of writing (literary novels, academic treatises, official documents, and reports, etc.) came entirely without illustration, and had graphically uniform dense pages of print. Paintings nearly all used the same support (canvas) and the same medium (oils), whatever their style or subject. In concert performances, all musicians dressed identically and only conductor and soloists were allowed a modicum of bodily expression. The specialised theoretical and critical disciplines which developed to speak of these arts became equally monomodal: one language to speak about language (linguistics), another to speak about art (art history), yet another to speak about music (musicology), and so on, each with its own methods, its own*

assumptions, its own technical vocabulary, its own strengths, and its own blind spots. *More recently, this dominance of monomodality has begun to reverse.* Not only the mass media, the pages of magazines, and comic strips for example, but also the documents produced by corporations, universities, government departments, etc., have acquired colour illustrations and sophisticated layouts and typography. And not only the cinema and the semiotically exuberant performances and videos of popular music, but also the avant-gardes of the ‘high culture’ arts have begun to use an increasing variety of materials and to cross the boundaries between the various art, design, and performance disciplines, towards *multimodal Gesamtkunstwerke*, multimedia events, and so on. [Our emphases]

Actually, multimodality is increasingly shaping communicative actions, encouraged and in turn encouraging technological progress in the field of (social) media. Predictably, the goal-oriented, dynamic, and fast-evolving domain of advertising is taking full advantage of such progress by creating *new genres* to better exploit the potentialities of new media (to give just one example, *in-game advertising* for video-games users). However, a constant feature in this field is the use of metaphor.

#### 4.1.1. Metaphors in advertising

Advertisements mainly rely on metaphors, which have also undergone ‘a pictorial turn’. While recent research has focused almost exclusively on the verbal and cognitive dimensions of metaphor, Forceville (1996) has argued that metaphor can also occur in pictures and proposed a multidisciplinary model, also relying on the relevance theory (see note 9), for the classification and analysis of ‘multimodal metaphors’ in advertising. Such metaphors were defined as ‘metaphors whose target and source domains are each represented exclusively or predominately in different modes’ (Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009, 24), such as (1) pictorial signs; (2) written signs; (3) spoken signs; (4) gestures; (5) sounds; (6) music; (7) smells; (8) tastes; and (9) touch. In more detail, pertaining to the spatial distribution of pictorial elements, three forms of metaphor can be identified (Van Mulken, Le Pair, Forceville 2010): *Similes* (the target and source are visually presented separately), *Hybrids* (the target and source are fused together), and *Contextual Metaphors* (either the source or target is visually absent).

Further, metaphoric and iconic hand gestures are particularly effective at conveying core semantic properties of products compared to other non-gestural images, given that the synchrony of speech forms and gestures creates the conditions for an imagery-language dialectic (McNeill 1992, 2005).<sup>4</sup>

Another relevant notion for defining the conceptual background of the languages of advertising is *resonance* – an aspect of the formal structure of an advertisement – which occurs when there is a repetition of elements, or when a phrase is given a different meaning by its juxtaposition with a picture (McQuarrie and Mick 1996). Such redundancy within an advert leads to an exchange, condensation, or multiplication of meaning. In other terms, the elements must echo or mirror one another, suggesting a *doubleness* within an advertisement: either one thing or class of things has multiple meanings, or multiple elements are joined into a single meaning (McQuarrie 1989). Here follows the classic taxonomy of rhetorical figures in advertising according to McQuarrie and Mick (1996):

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<sup>4</sup> In summary, a cultural metaphoric gesture is the ‘palm up open hand’, in which the hand(s) present a discursive object. In other terms, in the so-called ‘conduit’ metaphor (i.e. a metaphor recurring in the general European metaphor culture and in other cultures, but not universally) an abstract idea is presented as if it were a substance in the hand or a container. At verbal level, possible examples are ‘the movie had a lot of meaning’, where the movie is a container, or ‘she handed him that idea’, where an idea is on or in the hand.

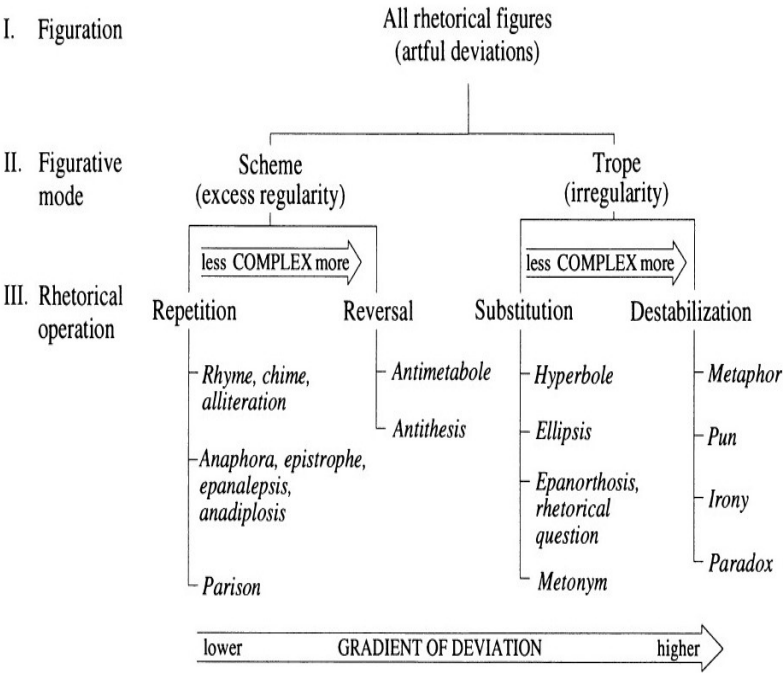


Figure 1: Taxonomy of rhetorical figures in advertising.

To better illustrate such a way of analysing adverts, below is a practical application of such taxonomy, elaborated (with some approximation) by Stella and Stewart (2005):

Substitution (Simple Tropes)	Type of Trope	Definition	Example
	Metonym	Use of a portion, or any associated element, to represent the whole	'The imports are getting nervous' (Buick automobile)
	Ellipsis	A gap or omission that has to be completed	'Everyday vehicles that aren't' (Suzuki)
	Hyperbole	Exaggerated or extreme claim	'Experience colour so rich you can feel it' (Cover Girl Lipstick)
	Epanorthosis	Making an assertion so as to call it into question	'Chances are, you'll buy a Ranger for its value, economy, and quality. Yeah, right'. (Ford pickup truck)
	Rhetorical Question	Asking a question so as to make an assertion	'Don't you have something better to do'? (Hewlett-Packard plain paper fax)
	Antanaclasis	Repeating a word in two different senses	'Today's Slims at a very slim price'. (Misty ultralight cigarettes)
	Resonance	A phrase is given a different meaning by its juxtaposition with a picture	'Will bite when cornered' (with a picture of a car splashing up water as it makes a turn). (Goodyear tires)
	Irony	A statement that means the opposite of what is said	'Just another wholesome family sitcom' (with a picture of the male lead licking cream off thighs). (HBO cable TV)

Destabilisation (Complex Tropes)	Syllepsis	A verb takes on a different sense as the clauses it modifies are upheld	‘Built to handle the years as well as the groceries’. (Frigidaire refrigerator)
	Homonym	One word can be taken in two senses	‘Make fun of the road’. (Ford automobile)
	Metaphor	Substitution based on an underlying resemblance	‘Say hello to your child’s new bodyguards’. (Johnson & Johnson Band-aids)
	Paradox	A self-contradictory, false, or impossible statement	‘This picture was taken by someone who didn’t bring a camera’. (Kodak film)

Figure 2: Tropes of substitution and destabilisation in advertising

In a slightly different vein, as regards the range of possible systemic/functional relations between image and text, the taxonomy proposed by Marsh and White (2003, 653) can be a useful frame for analysing the verbal/visual relationship in advertising.

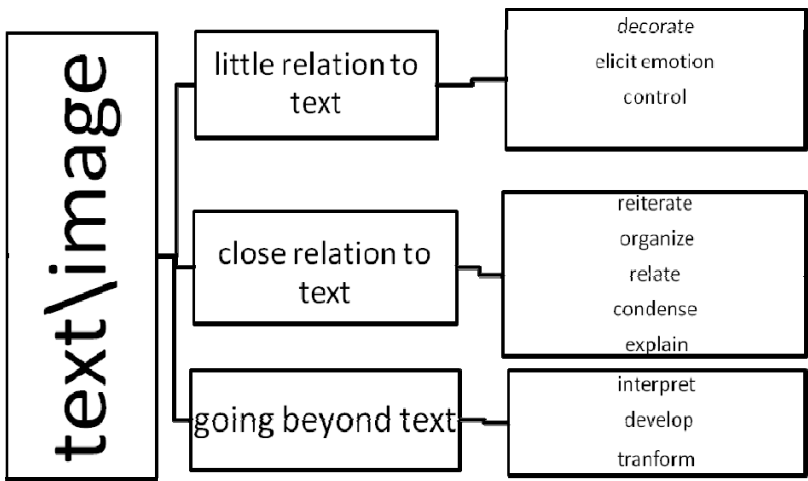


Figure 3. Text-Image relation (adapted from Marsh and White 2003)