



## Texas Hold'em Anglicisms in Italian

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### ABSTRACT

Although gambling has a long tradition and evidence of its practice can be found even in antiquity, the game of poker – initially associated with US casinos – consolidated its present form and spread all over the world only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The late 1990s, when technology allowed poker to go online, marked the birth of a mass phenomenon attracting millions of players anywhere Internet connections were available. Interest in the game and the potential for big wins at the World Series of Poker in Las Vegas and other tournaments have resulted in the birth of communities of professionals and amateur players with their own specialised language. This paper deals with the English terms typical of the variety of poker known as Texas Hold'em which have filtered into the Italian language as direct and indirect borrowings. A small corpus of Anglicisms has been collected from Italian dictionaries and official regulations. Although only few English poker terms are registered in Italian dictionaries, their number is much higher in official regulations, where they are sometimes accompanied by Italian translation equivalents, but more often used in their original or derived forms. Such difference indicates that the influence of English in this specialised area of vocabulary is rapidly growing, with terms and phrases being assimilated as part of the jargon of poker circles and regular players.

*Keywords: gambling, poker, Texas Hold'em, Anglicisms*

### SINOSSI

Sebbene il gioco d'azzardo abbia una lunga tradizione di cui si ha traccia fin dall'antichità, il poker – inizialmente associato ai casinò statunitensi – ha consolidato la sua forma attuale e si è diffuso in tutto il mondo solo nel XX secolo. I tardi anni 90 del secolo scorso, quando la

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tecnologia ha reso possibile il poker online, hanno segnato la nascita di un fenomeno di massa al quale si sono avvicinati milioni di giocatori ovunque fosse disponibile una connessione internet. L'interesse per il gioco e le potenziali ingenti vincite alle World Series of Poker di Las Vegas e altri tornei hanno fatto sì che nascessero comunità di giocatori, professionisti e non, con una propria lingua specialistica. Il presente articolo esamina i termini in inglese tipici della varietà di poker nota come Texas Hold'em entrati nella lingua italiana come prestiti diretti e indiretti. È stato creato un piccolo corpus di anglicismi attingendo a dizionari di italiano e regolamenti ufficiali. Benché i dizionari riportino pochissimi anglicismi relativi al poker, il loro numero è decisamente elevato nei regolamenti ufficiali, dove i termini inglesi sono talvolta seguiti da traduttori italiani, ma più spesso usati in originale o in forme derivate. Tale differenza indica che l'influenza dell'inglese in quest'area del lessico è in rapido aumento, con vocaboli e sintagmi assorbiti nel gergo dei circoli di poker e dei giocatori assidui.

*Parole chiave: gioco, poker, Texas Hold'em, anglicismi*

## 1. Introduction

Lexical borrowing has been the object of empirical and theoretical study mostly focusing on the penetration of English into other languages due to its predominance in international communications. According to Görlach (2001, p. xviii), Anglicisms are recognisable on the basis of their spelling, pronunciation and/or morphology, which mark them as distinctively English. Borrowings may also involve different degrees of interference, resulting in lexical units adapted to the recipient language, hybrids, calques, semantic loans and false Anglicisms (Gottlieb 2005, 2012; Furiassi, 2010, among others). The typology provided by Pulcini, Furiassi & Rodríguez González (2012) distinguishes between 'direct' borrowings, i.e. Anglicisms which show formal evidence of their source language, and 'indirect', which do not immediately stand out as foreign lexical items, since their spelling, pronunciation and/or morphological pattern show varying degrees of integration into the recipient language. Anticipating some of the terminology of Texas Hold'em dealt with in this article, examples of the former category are *poker*, a non-adapted loanword retaining the orthography and, to a certain degree, the pronunciation of the donor language; *cip* (from the English *chip*), an adapted loanword; *full*, an elliptical form of the English term *full-house*, and therefore a false Anglicism, and *poker-dadi*, a hybrid, resulting from the combination of an English and an Italian element. Forms of indirect borrowings include calques (literal or loose translations of loanwords, such as *buio* for *blind*), semantic loans (*mazziera* for *dealer*), compounds and phrases like *direttore di gara* for *tournament director* and larger phraseological routines such as *Shuffle-up and deal*.

English-induced lexical borrowing in Italian has been growing after WW2, with a remarkable increase in numbers and fields of experience following the relatively

recent spread of the Internet. Traditionally, the adoption of foreign words in a recipient language – one of the possible outcomes of language contact – testifies to varying degrees of cultural, commercial or political influence (Winford, 2003). However, the phenomenon has been growing exponentially for the last two decades since the borderlessness and acceleration brought about by the Internet have stretched the notion of language contact in virtual space, thereby allowing words and practices to reverberate unlimitedly. For example, according to a recent study (Pulcini, 2017) the new millennium has witnessed a remarkable increase of Anglicisms in Italian: depending on the lexicographic resource considered,<sup>2</sup> between 178 and 573 new borrowings have been found in the period 2001-2016, most of which belonging to the fields of IT and the Internet (amounting to a staggering 73% of the Anglicisms recorded in *lo Zingarelli 2017*).

One of the fields whose surge is indebted to the Internet is that of gambling, apparently an age-old universal activity whose different forms have coalesced into a certain number of games usually (but not exclusively) played in land-based as well as online casinos according to internationally accepted rules. While some words related to gambling had already been borrowed from American English at the turn of the last century – *poker* (1893 or 1905),<sup>3</sup> *crack* (1905),<sup>4</sup> *bluff* (1908),<sup>5</sup> *showdown* (1921)<sup>6</sup> – it was in the second half of the twentieth century that Italian society and culture underwent a pervasive Americanisation. Language contact, increasingly intensified through the massive migration of Italians attracted by the thriving economic development of the USA in the late 1870s, led to the first attested borrowings from American English in the 1890s (Iamartino, 2001). The prestige this language variety started to enjoy thanks to the growing technological and political leadership of the USA peaked after WW2, initially because of the presence of the allies and the

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<sup>2</sup> The search, carried out in the most recent electronic editions of Italian dictionaries, identified 573 Anglicisms in *Grande dizionario italiano dell'uso* (1999/2007), 187 in *lo Zingarelli 2017* and 510 in *il Devoto-Oli. Vocabolario della lingua italiana 2017*.

<sup>3</sup> The first recorded appearance of the term *poker* is indicated as 1905 in most of the Italian dictionaries consulted – *il Devoto-Oli* (2016), *Grande dizionario italiano dell'uso* (2007), *lo Zingarelli* (2017) –, while *il Sabatini-Coletti* (2013) reports 1893.

<sup>4</sup> *Il Sabatini-Coletti* (2013).

<sup>5</sup> *Il Sabatini-Coletti* (2013) and *Grande dizionario italiano dell'uso* (2007). The term has been borrowed from American English, which in turn adapted it from Dutch.

<sup>6</sup> *Grande dizionario italiano dell'uso* (2007).

provisions of the European Recovery Program,<sup>7</sup> and later due to the unquestioned pursuit of the American way of life, massively spread through consumer goods, cinema, advertising, television and the Internet (Pulcini, 1997).

This study focuses on a specific subfield of gambling, namely that of poker and its offshoot Texas Hold'em, which has not only become very popular in Italian culture but has also heightened the ongoing debate on the state's ambivalent position regarding gambling as both a source of tax revenue and a cause of addiction, with its related personal and social costs. The widespread presence of betting venues, the countless gaming websites and the growing phenomenon of pathological gambling would suggest a relevant impact on the Italian language, with abundant lexical borrowing from English. As a matter of fact, even a summary review of recent books on poker strategies – both translated from English and originally written by Italian professionals<sup>8</sup> – and thematic websites shows a frequent use of English terms and suggests a promising field of study not only for its socio-cultural aspects but also for linguistic analysis, which seems to be lacking. My purpose is to study Texas Hold'em Anglicisms in Italian starting from the terms recorded in dictionaries and extending then the research to more specialised contexts characterised by incrementally expert users. Data have therefore been retrieved from the most recent digital editions of four Italian dictionaries and from official Texas Hold'em regulations. Finally, players' blogs and forums have been looked at to check whether the Anglicisms thus found are in actual use: not only were they confirmed, but the quantity and variety of the Anglicisms used by experts are such that a follow-up analysis would need to be carried out on a representative sample of those texts, since such genre also requires different parameters given its conventions and register peculiarities.

The paper is divided into three sections. First, a brief history of gambling is outlined with particular focus on poker and Texas Hold'em. Then, the corpus and the methodology used are described, and finally the findings are presented and

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<sup>7</sup> The European Recovery Program, more commonly known as the Marshall Plan, was an American initiative to help the reconstruction in Western Europe after WW2. It marked the end of the USA's isolationism, its move towards the assumption of world leadership and the "search for a new economic order at home and abroad" (Hogan, 1987, p. 2).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Cannizzaro, A. (2012). *I'm all-in. Le emozioni del Texas Hold'em e le scommesse della vita*. Roma: Gremese; Ferrari Zumbini, F. (2013). *Il nuovo Poker*. Milano: Mondadori; Harlan, M. (2012). *Texas Hold'em per negati*. Milano: Mondadori; Pagano, L. (2014). *Dal Texas Hold'em a Las Vegas*. Roma: Gremese; Sklansky, D. (2008). *Teoria del poker*. Rovereto: Boogaloo.

discussed.

## 2. Gambling throughout history

Gambling refers to activities “of or pertaining to risking of money or something of value on the outcome of a chance event such as a card or dice game” (Clark, 1987, in Thompson, 2015, p. 13). The propensity for risk taking is a distinctive human trait of which there are traces even in ancient societies, with dice as the most pervasive form of gambling. The earliest specimens were discovered in royal tombs in Mesopotamia, but dice have been found in China (ca. 2000 BC) and ancient Egypt (600 BC), while excavations have revealed that the first 6-faced dice were used by the Etruscans, reaching then Rome around 900 BC (Arnold, 1977). In Greek history, the first references to dice appear in Sophocle’s and Herodotus’ writings in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, while various forms of betting and gambling are mentioned in the Old Testament and in works by Aristotle and Tacitus; gambling appears to have been popular among the Romans, who are also credited as the first to have introduced chips in order to circumvent the prohibition to bet money. Similarly, the oldest playing cards originated in 9<sup>th</sup>-century China and Northern India, spreading then to Europe, and reportedly played by Columbus’ crew during the voyage to the New World (Thompson, 2015, p. xvii). Gambling continued to develop during the Renaissance and acquired a more official status in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when a lottery was held in London to support the Virginia Colony (1612-1615), and the first government-authorized gambling house, the Ridotto, was set up in Venice (1638).

Gambling houses and casinos mushroomed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both in Europe and in the Americas, where the games imported from the Old World added to – and then mostly replaced – indigenous forms of betting pre-dating European settlements, even developing their own local peculiarities like riverboat gambling along the Mississippi and saloons in the Far West. In 1910, gambling was officially prohibited in the USA, only to be legalised again after the 1929 Wall Street crash and the ensuing depression, starting with Nevada in 1931. Around the same period, the fascist regime in Italy had an ambiguous attitude towards gambling: condemned because of its supposed weakening effects on the individual and thereby the nation, it was tolerated at first and then officially legalised in casinos near the French, Austrian and Yugoslavian borders so as to prevent the richest gamblers from going abroad and at the same time promote the economic development of depressed areas (Mandelli, 2012). These three casinos, plus a fourth situated in an Italian exclave in Switzerland, were closed in 1940 and reopened at the end of WW2. Although they still exist, it is the recent national laws regulating both privately-owned betting centres and online

gaming that have opened the door to a wide international range of options for players.

## 2.1. Poker and Texas Hold'em

Poker is probably the most common and evocative hyponym when referring to gambling card games. Its origins are controversial: some think it evolved out of a French game called *poque*, others consider it deriving from an at least 500-year-old German game called *Pochspiel*, while another theory has it related to the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Persian game called *as nas*. Once it spread in America, it quickly rose in popularity and became one of the *topoi* of the Wild West, later celebrated in films and novels.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, its recognition as a skill game (as against a game of chance) made its legalisation easier and paved the way for its surge in 1970, when – after an initial world tournament in Reno (Nevada) in 1968 – the World Series of Poker (WSOP) were held at Binion's Horseshoe, the first casino opened in Las Vegas about twenty years before. Benny Binion invited to the tournament seven of the best-known poker players, who formed a jury and voted the best player, whose prize was only a silver cup. From the next year, a winner-take-all policy attracted greater attention, and the 1973 CBS Sports coverage, with its follow-up of poker celebrities, brought it to the wide public. This was the beginning of a mass phenomenon which, from its initial five events and about thirty players, in the current year's edition has blown to 74 events and 120,995 players<sup>9</sup>. Although a number of poker varieties are played – such as draw, seven- and five-card stud, lowball, etc. – it is Texas Hold'em that has become the most popular game, especially after the epoch-making 2003 victory by Chris Moneymaker, who won \$2,500,000 and attracted large numbers of new players.

The new frontier of poker began in 1998 with the opening of Planet Poker, the first online poker room, quickly followed by other sites catering for millions of gamblers. As this virtual dimension grew, leading to huge amounts of money travelling outside national borders, governments started to make stricter regulations, climaxing in the USA on April 15, 2011, the so-called 'Black Friday', when the three largest online poker providers available to US players – PokerStars, Full Tilt Poker and the Cereus Poker Network – had their assets and bank accounts seized by the Department of

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.wsop.com/wsop/history.asp> [20/06/2017]; <http://www.wsop.com/2017/final-table> [28/07/2017].

Justice. Although the sector is variously regulated all over the world, online poker and betting facilities are still thriving thanks to both the promise of quick money and other advantages such as playing speed – with 80-100 games per hour as against 30-35 live (Pescatori & De Toffoli, 2009, p. 5); ubiquity – the opportunity to play at several ‘tables’ at the same time; and convenience, i.e. the possibility of playing poker games wherever an Internet connection is available.

In Italy, the situation is further complicated by the refusal of CONI, the Italian National Olympic Committee, to include live poker among sports disciplines (of which bridge, instead, is one) on the grounds that it relies more on chance than on skill. Also, while the first live poker clubs opened in Italy in 2005 and multiplied in a few years, in 2009 they were forced to close because gambling was (and is) legal only in the four national casinos. In 2013, when a sentence ruled that, pending a law regulating live poker, gaming is not a crime, live poker clubs started to work again and it is now estimated that in the last three years between 500 and 1000 circles have been hosting games and tournaments, thereby questioning the rationale of national laws that ban live poker but permit its online version.<sup>10</sup>

The poker variety known as Texas Hold’em is played with a normal 52-card deck excluding jokers. The dealer gives each player two face-down cards and turns three community cards (the *flop*) on the table, followed, in the next rounds, by a fourth card (the *turn*) and a final one (the *river*). By combining their personal cards with the community cards, each player tries to obtain the best possible five-card hand. The various combinations are ranked in order of value, with the highest being the *royal flush* (from an ace down to a ten of the same suit) and the lowest *one pair* (two cards of the same rank). Bets are placed before the first three community cards are turned and after each of the subsequent deals. Players can *check* (continue the hand deferring their bet), *call* (bet the same amount of money as the last player in order to see the next card), *raise* (trusting their cards, or bluffing, they bet more money than the last player thereby obliging the next to at least match the bet in order to continue) or *fold* (give up their cards and abandon the hand).

As can be expected, such a codified game has generated a specialised language with its own standardised terminology labelling concepts and situations univocally so as to ensure comprehension and adherence to the rules.

### 3. Corpus and methodology

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pokeritaliaweb.org/piw-editoriali/30564-poker-editoriale-legalizzare-il-poker-live-nei-circoli-italiani.html> [10/08/2017].



To test the hypothesis of substantial borrowing from English, I collected the Anglicisms used in the field of poker and its variety Texas Hold'em and analysed their morphological features and context of use. Their presence was investigated at the level of *langue* and *parole*, i.e. in the dimension of a lexical repertoire meant for general use as against real texts meant for (prospective) players. Thus, the starting point were dictionaries as the official records of words belonging to Italian lexis; then the 2012 and 2014 editions of the official regulations of FIGP (*Federazione Italiana Gioco Poker*) were analysed, and the most conspicuous Anglicisms were checked against online exchanges between players.

Assuming that some poker and Texas Hold'em Anglicisms were likely to have been recorded, the initial stage was to search the latest digital editions of the most authoritative dictionaries of Italian. The *Grande dizionario italiano dell'uso* (1999/2007, henceforth GDU), containing about 270,000 entries in six volumes plus two updates, is characterised by its focus on usage, labelling lemmas as BU, AU and CO<sup>11</sup> to indicate low frequency, high frequency and common usage respectively, while a wide range of labels mark field, style and etymology. The search carried out by selecting ES (*esotismo*, indicating words of foreign origin) and then *ingl.* (English) yielded 5,850 non-adapted Anglicisms. By adding the field label *giochi* (games), 12 lemmas were retrieved, none of which related to poker or Texas Hold'em. The next step was to remove both ES and the field label, and digit the word 'poker' in the full-text search box: 46 terms were found, among which 9 non-adapted Anglicisms.

In order to collate results and make up for the GDU's relative datedness (2007), three more recent Italian dictionaries were used, namely *lo Zingarelli 2018. Vocabolario della lingua italiana* (2017, henceforth Zing), a long-standing, initially serialised project which since 1993 has been updated yearly; *il Devoto-Oli. Vocabolario della lingua italiana* (2016, henceforth DO), and *il nuovo Sabatini Coletti. Dizionario della lingua italiana* (2013, henceforth SC), both of which, with their focus on verb patterns and derived forms, show a more marked pedagogical approach. The hypothesis was that, despite their smaller size (between 145,000 and 190,000 entries), their coverage of the latest years might reveal a greater number of English words used in the domain of poker or Texas Hold'em. The search followed basically the same steps as in the GDU, again yielding very low numbers: 54 words referring to poker, of which 6 Anglicisms in Zing; 40 and 2 in DO; 34 and 8 in SC (see Tables 1 and 2 below).

Anglicisms in actual use among Texas Hold'em players were identified by examining

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<sup>11</sup> BU = *basso uso*; AU = *alto uso*; CO = *comune*.



the regulations issued by the *Federazione Italiana Gioco Poker*. The FIGP is a body founded in 2006 with the aim to promote poker as a sports discipline (thus redeeming it from the stigma associated with gambling) and, as such, equip it with a set of rules in order to ensure uniformity of play. According to the foreword to the 2012 and 2014 editions of the FIGP regulations, the over 1,000,000 downloads of the first edition (2006) made it the law-giver to Texas Hold'em nation-wide, "from municipal poker clubs to casinos" (my translation). As such spread prompted the need to harmonise the rules with those of the most important international organisations in the field, the Italian regulations explicitly followed the recommendations of the *Tournament Directors Association*, the only internationally acknowledged reference body. The foreword also points out that, as the game was attracting growing interest, it was necessary to define the terminology; hence the presence of a 9-page glossary containing 137 technical terms in English denoting players, staff, actions, cards or game situations. Such glossary, however, was not considered in this analysis as the presence of Anglicisms was the very reason for its own existence and would not provide any information regarding their nature and use in actual texts.

The analysis of the small corpus thus gathered was carried out digitally and manually. Voyant Tools, a web-based text reading and analysis environment,<sup>12</sup> was used to calculate the total number of tokens and types, generate word lists, identify the most frequently used terms, and see them in context. Manual analysis, however, was needed to find English terms within the word list, recognize productive forms and disambiguate cases of heteronyms, e.g. 'fine' and 'prime',<sup>13</sup> which, read within their contexts, revealed themselves as Italian words.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Findings in the Italian dictionaries

The quantitative data retrieved from the four dictionaries taken into consideration are synthesised in Table 1:

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<sup>12</sup> <https://voyant-tools.org> [August 2017].

<sup>13</sup> In Italian, *fine* /fine/, is 1) a noun meaning 'ending' and 'end or goal', and 2) an adjective meaning, among others, 'thin, frail, refined'; In English, *fine* /faɪn/ is an adjective meaning 'good, delicate, minute'. *Prime*, /prime/ in Italian and /praɪm/ in English, is a feminine plural adjective meaning 'first in chronological order', and an adjective and noun meaning 'first in rank or importance, main, excellent' and 'bloom' respectively.

	GDU	Zing	DO	SC
Total entries	270,000	145,000	150,000	190,000
Non-adapted Anglicisms	5,850	2,824	3,522	2,536
Poker terms	46	54	40	34
Poker Anglicisms	9	6 (+ A, J, K, Q)	2	8

Table 1. Quantitative data retrieved from the dictionaries examined.

The Anglicisms referring to poker total 17 (13 lemmas plus the 4 capitalised initials A, J, K, Q standing for 'Ace', 'Jack', 'King' and 'Queen'). Of these, two are recorded in all the dictionaries used, as Table 2 shows.

	GDU	Zing	DO	SC
blind				✓
blue chip				✓
<b>bluff</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caribbean poker	✓			
crack	✓	✓		✓
flush	✓			✓
highball		✓		
jackpot		✓		✓
over	✓			
<b>poker</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
showdown	✓	✓		✓
strip poker	✓			
titanic	✓			
A (Ace)		✓		
J (Jack)		✓		
K (King)		✓		
Q (Queen)		✓		

Table 2. Non-adapted poker Anglicisms recorded in the dictionaries examined.

Only *bluff* and *poker* appear in all four dictionaries, although with some difference in dates. *Bluff* – in poker, the action of deceiving opponents by betting high on an unpromising hand or betting low on a good one – is reported as first recorded in Italian in 1908, borrowed from American English, which in turn had adapted it from the Dutch verb *bluffen* (in 1859, according to the GDU). As is often the case, only one of the meanings of the polysemous term *bluff* has

been borrowed,<sup>14</sup> although its use in Italian is no longer restricted to poker, but frequently found in other games as well as in political and economic discourse. *Bluff* has sprouted derived forms – mainly the verb *bluffare* (GDU, Zing, DO, SC), which has been formed by adding the most common and regular conjugation ending, *-are*, and the rarely used nouns *bluffatore* (DO, Zing, SC) and *bluffista* (GDU), both meaning ‘bluffer’. The pronunciation of *bluff* and its derived forms in Italian is unstable and influenced by regional accents: while the English /blʌf/ and the fully Italianised /bluf/ can be heard, the most frequent versions are /blɛf/ (GDU, DO, Zing) and /'blœf/ (GDU, SC). The former prevails, while the latter is typical of the northwest of the country, where the proximity to France and the shared belonging to the Gallo-Italic group of languages are manifested in the distinctive front rounded vowel /œ/, which as a matter of fact also characterises the pronunciation of *club* /klœb/ (Pulcini, 2002, p. 154).

The term *poker*, whose origins have been discussed before, is indicated in all the dictionaries as dating back to 1905, except in SC, where 1893 is reported as its first recorded use. In Italian, it refers both to the game – and is therefore an Anglicism –, and to the highly desirable hand containing four cards of the same value (in English, ‘four of a kind’) or, in non-specialised language, to any combination of four elements working together to positively affect a certain outcome, thereby providing an instance of a false Anglicism (Furiassi, 2010, p. 188). Considered an untranslatable word, with a few other sports and games it survived the attempts to find Italian replacements as requested by fascist legislative measures and public competitions in the 1930s and early 1940s (Pulcini, forthcoming). A few derivatives are recorded, all of them formed by adding suffixes: *pokerino* (GDU, Zing, DO, SC), where the productive diminutive *-ino* adds the connotations of smallness and familiarity, thus implying a game played with very low stakes in a non-competitive atmosphere; *pokerissimo*, (GDU) a technical term used in rummy when all the cards in a hand are of the same value or, in poker played with a deck including jokers, when a hand is made of five of a kind; the suffix *-issimo*, usually added to adjectives to form the absolute su-

<sup>14</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* ([www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)), *bluff*, which can be a noun, an adjective or a verb, has various meanings, ranging from ‘a headland’ to ‘a blinker for horses’, from ‘flat’ to ‘surlly’, from ‘to blindfold’ to ‘to swell out’. The oldest recorded occurrence (1627) is a nautical adjective of uncertain origin and it is the only instance where a possible Dutch influence is mentioned; *bluff* as discussed here appears to be also a synonym of ‘poker’ reported to have been “first used in US” and exemplified through quotations from mainly American sources. *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (1993), instead, reports the probable Dutch origin of the term.

perlative (e.g. *buonissimo* > extremely good), in this case is added to a noun, a less frequent derivational process meant to transform a certain person, object or situation into the epitome of its own class or to highlight its importance (e.g. *partitissima* > the ultimate match; *veglionissimo* > New Year's Eve ball). *Pokerista* (GDU, Zing, SC) denotes a committed player by adding the fairly productive suffix *-ista*, which is often used to refer to professionals or people following certain ideologies (e.g. *anestesista* > anesthesiologist, *tennista* > tennis player, *socialista* > socialist); its own adjectival derivative, *pokeristico*, is only recorded in Zing and labelled as technicism. The GDU also reports *poker-dadi*, a hybrid labelled as TS (technicism) which denotes a variant of the game played with dice. The orthographic adaptation *pocher* and its derivatives are also indicated, but the GDU points out their low frequency.

Neither in quantity nor in terms of recent appearance do the terms listed in Table 2 confirm the hypothesis of an increase in poker terms since the spread of the Internet. Actually, apart from *blind* (1989), *blue chip* (1979), *Caribbean poker* (1999) and *jackpot* (Zing 1985; SC 1991), all the other terms show a well-established presence in Italian starting from the early twentieth century. It is also remarkable that no poker Anglicism has been recorded after the year 2000 despite the popularity of the game.

All four lexicographic resources contain three other poker terms variously related to English – *cip*, *full* and *videopoker* – each of which has entered the lexicon via different processes. *Cip*, the minimum bet placed before the beginning of a game, dates back to 1931 and is the orthographic adaptation of the English 'chip', a token representing money generally used in casinos. *Full*, a hand with three of a kind plus a pair, has been used since 1948 and is a case of compound ellipsis of the English term 'full house' (Furiassi, 2010, p. 165). According to the GDU, Zing and SC, *videopoker* made its appearance in 1985, while DO reports 1999. As a matter of fact, a pioneer version of a poker machine was invented in Brooklyn already in 1891, but as its chance-based results did not involve an automated payout, it was soon replaced by its more rewarding competitor, the slot-machine or 'one-armed bandit'. In the 1970s, when technology made it possible to visualise the game on a screen, the perfected poker machine started to be popular in land-based casinos and in the 1990s it moved on to the Internet.<sup>15</sup> The term, spelt as two words in English and one word in its Italian use, is a compound of the first person singular present indicative of the Latin verb

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.pokerdictionary.net/casino-games/video-poker-origins-and-variants/> [17/08/2017].

*vidēre* ('to see')<sup>16</sup> and *poker*. Probably adopted in English by analogy with the older Latin loanword 'audio', a combining form used to coin words related to sound or hearing, *video* is reported in the OED as having first been used in 1934 in adjectival function, "of, relating to, or concerned with the images displayed on a television or other electronic device, or the electrical signal, channel, etc., conveying such images".<sup>17</sup> While etymology suggests that Italian borrowed *video* from Latin, the fact that the popularity of the term grew with technological products and services coming mostly from the USA confirms the mediating role of English. Highly present in the OED (with about 80 lemmas), *video* – with its 68 compounds recorded in the GDU, of which 12 Anglicisms – is the second most productive neo-classical combining form in Italian, only preceded by *multi-* (Pulcini & Milani, 2017).

#### 4.2. Findings in the FIGP official regulations

As previously mentioned, the glossary was not included in the count and analysis of Anglicisms; however, it is worth noticing that although arranged in alphabetical order into a seemingly homogeneous piece of work, it reveals differences in the way entries are treated, which may be a result of the current transitional phase in the spread of the game and its terminology. Sometimes the grammatical class of a lemma is changed in the passage from one language to the other: for instance, a verb may be defined in terms of the action it represents and then be used within Italian sentences as if it were a noun or a noun phrase. An example is *check*, a verb denoting the choice to stay in the game without making any bet on the current hand, which is rendered as *fare check* (literally, 'do' check), as shown below:

**Check:** Quando sei ancora coinvolto in una mano di poker ed è il tuo turno di agire e non vi sono state puntate precedenti, puoi decidere di *fare "check"*, passando l'azione al giocatore successivo senza effettuare alcuna puntata. *Facendo check* ti riservi il diritto di [...] (FIGP, 2012, p. 22, my italics).<sup>18</sup>

Entries are usually glossed and circumstances of use are described; alternatively,

<sup>16</sup> **Video**, *adj.* **Origin:** Apparently a borrowing from Latin, combined with an English element. **Etymology:** Apparently < classical Latin *vidēre* to see (see *VISION n.*) + *-o-* *connective* [...] Usually *attrib.* www.oed.com [24/07/2017].

<sup>17</sup> www.oed.com [17/08/2017].

<sup>18</sup> **Check:** when it is your turn and no one has made a bet yet, you can choose to 'check', that is you do not make any bet and pass the action to the next player (FIGP, 2012, p. 22, my translation).

after the explanation, an entry may be used in example(s), often in its untranslated form, thus creating hybrid, intra-sentential cases of code-switching (Winford, 2003) which can involve the definition itself:

**Backdoor:** Termine solitamente utilizzato nel Texas Hold'em riferendosi a una scala o a un colore realizzati grazie sia al *turn* sia al *river*. Ad esempio, hai Asso e Donna di fiori e sul *flop* c'è una sola carta di fiori. Se il *turn* e il *river* sono entrambi fiori, hai realizzato *un colore backdoor*. Può essere associato al termine progetto (draw), "*Ho un progetto di colore backdoor*" o a una mano già finita, "*Ha chiuso la scala backdoor*". Spesso è anche chiamato "*runner runner*" (FIGP, 2012, p. 21, my italics).

Sometimes, instead, a tentative Italian equivalent is provided in brackets:

**Expectation:** L'expectation (*aspettativa*) è l'importo che realizzeresti in media se ti trovassi nella stessa situazione centinaia di volte [...] (FIGP, 2012, p. 24, my italics)

or in inverted commas:

**Cripple:** Spesso usato nella frase "cripple the deck", quando hai tutte o la maggior parte delle carte necessarie per chiudere una mano molto forte unitamente alle carte sul board, si dice che il mazzo è stato "*azzoppato*". Un esempio è quando hai una coppia di Donne e le altre due Donne sono sul flop (FIGP, 2012, p. 23, my italics).

Italian equivalents are however rarely provided, which might suggest that in some cases no translation was deemed suitable, nor was resorting to already existing poker terms, a choice that could be indicative of the desire to promote Texas Hold'em as a new, autonomous discipline. Presumably by oversight, one entry is glossed in English in both versions, which – together with the abundance of syntactic and lexical calques – suggests that the glossary may be a translation carried out by one or more Texas Hold'em professional(s) relying on the readers' knowledge of the game more than on their own translational skills. A strong element of agentivity (van Coetsem, quoted by Winford 2003, p. 12) is noticeable in the whole process: Italian speakers who are expert players are both mediating between languages and cultures and prescribing the language to be used, thereby bringing change into the recipient culture, shaping a community of practice and endowing it with the "linguistic repertoires and rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech" (Winford, 2003, p. 26).

As the two editions of the regulations are very similar in length and contents – 8,344 tokens and 1,726 types in the 2012 edition; 8,626 tokens and 1,740 types in 2014 –

for the purpose of this piece of research only the one currently effective was analysed, i.e. that of 2014. Generally speaking, it strives towards greater clarity and correctness by reformulating some sentences and adding or deleting others (or parts thereof). Some English words have been eliminated (e.g. 'stalling', 'hit', 'implied'), while elsewhere translation equivalents have been added, as in

**Turn:** La quarta delle cinque carte comuni. Chiamata anche fourth street, o '*quarta strada*' (FIGP, 2014, p. 1).<sup>19</sup>

In other cases hybrid forms have replaced the previously non-adapted English terms. For example, in the section dedicated to the description of the game, the item detailing 'Limit' no longer includes the string 'bet, raise, reraise, cap' (FIGP, 2012, p. 8) but shows the hybrid formulation 'bet, raise, *secondo raise, terzo raise*' (FIGP, 2014, p. 4 – my italics): here, translation equivalents are built on the assumption that 'raise', one of the key moves in the game, is a term known to players, so the verb is nominalised and used as the head of noun phrases premodified by Italian adjectives, thus providing interconnected numerals that make the relationship between the sequence of the four actions much more explicit.

In some rare cases English terms have replaced Italian words or phrases, as in *mescolamento di carte*, which in the new edition has become 'riffle shuffle', while the generic *personale di sala* (staff) has been rendered as the more specific 'floorman' – albeit intermittently, which may reveal either the need to reserve certain tasks only to this particular member of staff or a certain degree of inconsistency, as suggested by the apparently interchangeable use of 'chips' and *gettoni*.

Table 3 below shows the list of Anglicisms found in the 2014 regulations: word types are reported on the basis of their frequency starting from the highest, while related forms are shown besides, with their respective number of occurrences, and have therefore not been shown as separate entries.

Word type	Occur.	Related forms (occur.)	Word type	Occur.	Related forms
dealer	52	dealers (1); deal (1) delaer [ <i>sic</i> ] 1	J	2	
all-in	31		K	2	
chips	30	chip (8)	kicker	2	
call	23		kind	2	

<sup>19</sup> **Turn:** The fourth community card. Also called fourth street, or "*quarta strada*" (my translation; my italics).



*Texas Hold'em Anglicisms in Italian*

raise	22		of	2	
flop	18	preflop (2)	one	2	
pot	17	pots (1)	pair	2	
floorman	14		rabbit	2	
limit	14		riffle	2	
fold	12	foldata (4) folda (2) foldano (2) foldato (1)	shuffle	2	
hand	11	hands (1)	small	2	
staff	10		stack	2	
up	10		straight	2	
blind	9	blinds (1)	street	2	
check	9		Texas	2	
misdeal	9		undercall	2	undercalls (1)
TD (Tournament Director)	9		and	1	
bet	8		burned	1	
cards	8	card (4)	community	1	
hole	8		dumping	1	
side	8		ebook	1	
round	7		escalation	1	
showdown	7		fifth	1	
board	6		floor	1	
no	6	(in 'no-limit')	four	1	fourth (1)
poker	6		high	1	
race	6		house	1	
river	6		lpad	1	
heads	5		jolly	1	
minimum	5		laptop	1	
ante	4		main	1	
button	4		netbook	1	
collusion	4		play	1	player (1); replay (1)
color	4		pocket	1	
dead	4		razz	1	
director	4		room	1	
for	4		rouling [sic]	1	
standard	4		royal	1	
turn	4		soft	1	
e-mail	3		starting	1	

flush	3		string	1
full	3		stud	1
muck	3		table	1
TDA (Tournament Directors Association)	3		three	1
tournament	3	tournament [sic] 1	timer	1
big	2		to	1
handed	2		two	1
Hold'em	2		webcast	1
hunting	2			

Table 3. List of Anglicisms in the FIGP 2014 regulations.

As can be noticed, the largest group of terms consists of *hapax legomena* belonging to the general language which either refer to the situation surrounding the game (e.g. 'Ipad', 'laptop', 'starting', 'table', 'webcast') or acquire a very specific meaning within the Texas Hold'em community of practice, as for example 'burned', 'floor', 'room', 'soft'.<sup>20</sup> Among the lower frequencies, some words appear mainly or exclusively in multi-word units, as shown in Table 4:

Multi-word unit	Occurrence	Multi-word unit	occurrence
6-handed	2	minimum raise	4
big blind	2	no limit (no-limit)	6
chip dumping	1	[...] of a kind	2
chip race	6	one-player-to-one-hand	1
color up (color-up)	4	pocket cards	1
community cards	1	pot limit (pot-limit)	3
dead button	2	rabbit hunting	2
dead hand (dead hands)	2	riffle shuffle	2
fifth street	1	showdown all-in	1
fourth street	1	Shuffle-up and deal	1

<sup>20</sup> 'Burned' is said of the card that is discarded by the dealer after shuffling, just before turning the three community cards on the table; 'floor' can refer to the gaming area, but more often it is the shortened form of 'floorman', i.e. the person in charge of overseeing the games; 'room' denotes either the physical or virtual space devoted to poker; 'soft', usually collocating with 'play', refers to a strategy whereby a player keeps the stakes low so as to prevent relevant losses for another and is considered a form of cheating (<http://www.pokerlistings.it/imbrogli-piu-comuni-poker-online-collusion> [20/08/2017]; <https://www.pokerstars.it/poker/tournaments/rules/> [20/08/2017]).

hand for hand	4	side pot (side pots)	8
heads up (heads-up)	5	small blind	2
hole card (hole cards)	8	string bet	1
minimum bet	1	Tournament Director	4

Table 4. Multi-word units in the 2014 FIGP regulations.

The most frequent patterns are N+N and Adj+N, with two instances of N+Prep ('color up', 'heads up') and one Adj+Adj ('6-handed'). The three longest strings have very limited occurrence in the text, presumably for different reasons. The postmodifier in the form of a prepositional phrase 'of a kind' appears in the phrases 'three of a kind' and 'four of a kind', referring to combinations of cards in a hand; however, since there are well-established Italian equivalents (*tris* and *poker* respectively) which are also much shorter, the English terms are not likely to become common. 'One-player-to-one-hand' and 'shuffle-up and deal' are frozen formulae referring to a rule and announcing the beginning of the tournament respectively; in the regulations, they are paraphrased but left untranslated, probably because both live and online tournaments aspire to reproduce the atmosphere of the 'original' poker room, similarly to what happens with *rien ne va plus* in the game of roulette. Such instances show that sometimes English formulae are borrowed not so much for their referential contents but rather for the expressive function they fulfil, which corresponds to the case of synonymic loans postulated by Rodríguez González (1996).

Semantic content is at the basis of the well-established distinction between unique and synonymic loans (Bookless, 1982): the former refer to words which are borrowed because there is no equivalent in the receptor language, while the latter denote foreign words which double already existing terms, but often convey different connotations. Building on this, Rodríguez González (1996) points out stylistic markedness and the evaluative potential of loanwords, highlighting their expressive, interpersonal function. More recently, the labels 'catachrestic' and 'non-catachrestic innovations' have been suggested by Winter-Froemel & Onysko, who draw on rhetoric and pragmatics to account for "incremental (or additive) language change" (2012, p. 48). With reference to the Anglicisms found in my corpus, the birth and subsequent popularity of Texas Hold'em have generated a number of terms – e.g. 'flop', 'turn', 'river', 'big blind', 'small blind' – which are peculiar to the game and therefore likely to be maintained in the recipient language as loanwords denoting new referents and filling lexical gaps. On the other hand, many terms already belonged to the poker jargon and had fairly established Italian equivalents, e.g. 'dealer' – *mazziere*, 'pots' – *piatto*, 'call' – *chiamare* or *vedere*, 'raise' – *rilanciare*, but in the FIGP regulations they often appear in English and are therefore instances of

luxury or synonymic loans. However, while in some cases a preference for English can be noticed, most of the terms coexisting in the two languages do not seem to follow any identifiable pattern of use and may therefore have been alternated just for stylistic reasons in order to avoid excessive repetition or, in the case of 'floorman', preferred for its economy compared to the longer Italian noun phrase *responsabile di sala* (Table 5).

English term (occurrence)	Italian term (occurrence)
blind (9)	<i>buio</i> (26)
blinds (1)	<i>bui</i> (12)
call (23)	<i>chiam*</i> (15)
chip (8)	<i>gettone</i> (5); <i>gettone(i)</i> (3)
chips (30)	<i>gettoni</i> (25)
community cards (1)	<i>carte comuni</i> (5)
dead hand (1)	<i>mano inattiva</i> (5)
dead hands (1)	<i>mani inattive</i> (1)
floorman (14); floor (1)	<i>responsabile di sala</i> (3)
hand (11)	<i>mano</i> (98)
hands (1)	<i>mani</i> (16)
minimum bet (1)	<i>puntata minima</i> (4)
minimum raise (4)	<i>rilancio minimo</i> (3); <i>minimo rilancio</i> (3)
pot (17)	<i>piatto</i> (54)
raise (noun 21) (vb. 1)	<i>rilancio</i> (44); <i>rilanci</i> (n. 4); <i>rilanc*</i> (vb. 16)
rifle shuffle (1)	<i>prima mescolata</i> (2)
shuffle (1)	<i>mescol*</i> (n. + vb. 5) <i>rimescol*</i> (vb. 5)
side pot (7)	<i>piatto laterale</i> (1)
side pots (1)	-
Tournament Director (4); TD (9)	<i>Direttore di gara</i> (7)

Table 5. Coexisting interlingual synonyms and their occurrences in the 2014 FIGP regulations.

As Tables 4 and 5 show, most borrowings are nouns or nominalisations of verb forms. In Italian, loanwords are usually attributed inflections on the basis of natural gender, formal features, closest native semantic equivalent and – according to the consensus norm – the unmarked masculine gender; as for number, non-adapted Anglicisms do not usually take any inflectional plural, although hypercorrection may prompt users to add the English '-s' (Pulcini, 2002; Pulcini & Scarpino, 2017). In the 2014 regulations, the masculine gender is attributed to loanwords fairly consistently, sometimes on the basis of an assumed natural gender (e.g. *il floorman*, *il dealer*),

more frequently by analogy with their Italian equivalents (e.g. 'big blind' – *il grande buio*; 'the board' – *il tavolo*). Exceptions are few: 'call', which is glossed as both the 1<sup>st</sup>-person singular verb form *vedo* and as its feminine equivalent noun *chiamata*, but when it is used in English in the text it is treated as masculine (*un call*); 'chips', which is always feminine although its closest semantic equivalent is masculine (*i gettoni*), probably by analogy with the older equivalent *fiches*, borrowed from French.

A last consideration regards the verbs denoting the various actions, 'bet', 'call', 'check', 'fold', 'muck', and 'raise', which are generally nominalized. The only exception is 'fold', whose degree of morphological integration makes it an adapted Anglicism (Pulcini, Furiassi & Rodríguez González, 2012): *folda* (s/he folds), *foldano* (they fold), *foldata* and *foldato* (folded) are indeed instances of an English base inflected for tense and gender according to the Italian verb system. However, browsing Texas Hold'em blogs and forums by players and commentators, it is immediately noticeable that the community of practice has extended the process of integration to other actions and widened both the range of tenses and modes (e.g. *raisando* – 'raising'; *bettare* – 'to bet'; *checkavano* – they were checking; *raiserà* – s/he will raise)<sup>21</sup> and the English bases to include more specific actions and strategies (e.g. *shovando* – 'shoving'; *pushare* – 'to push'; *limpare* – 'to limp').<sup>22</sup> Such hybridisation blurs the distinction between words borrowed because of their information content and those borrowed for their markedness or prestige, suggesting instead a sort of tension. Non-English speaking players are probably caught between the language policy of the internationally acknowledged Poker Tournament Directors Association – which requires the use of "simple, unmistakable, time-honored declarations like: bet, raise [...]", warning that "the use of non-standard language is at player's risk [...]" and imposing the "English-only rule" in the USA while asking for "acceptable language(s)" to be clearly announced at non-US venues (Poker TDA, 2015, p.1) – and their own monolingual communities playing and discussing games. As in Onysko & Winter-Froemel (2011), actual usage shows a degree of interweaving that here seems to be the result of a double allegiance while still retaining an exclusionary

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[http://www.viveredipoker.eu/discussioni.asp?action=BuyLdo&Pack=0&id\\_record=5071&UsrSrc=NoUsr](http://www.viveredipoker.eu/discussioni.asp?action=BuyLdo&Pack=0&id_record=5071&UsrSrc=NoUsr) [07/10/2017]; <http://www.italiapokerclub.com/interviste-poker/92979/60d54v3d0nk-e-una-bolla-da-4000e-al-sunday-million> [07/10/2017]; [http://www.viveredipoker.eu/discussioni.asp?id\\_record=7721&Pag=1&wOpen=ok](http://www.viveredipoker.eu/discussioni.asp?id_record=7721&Pag=1&wOpen=ok) [07/10/2017].

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<http://www.tiltevents.it/breaking-millions-news-le-prendo-le-prendi-miniucchi-cooleragianni-no> [07/10/2017]; <http://www.sisalpokeracademy.it/scuola/strategiamultitavolo/affrontare-final-table> [07/10/2017]; <https://it.pokerstrategy.com/forum/thread.php?threadid=70787> [07/10/2017].

opaqueness towards non-players.

## 5. Conclusion

Despite its ancient origins, gambling has acquired a new dimension due to the possibility of playing on the Internet, and one of its most popular forms, Texas Hold'em, is dominating both land-based casinos and clubs and online poker rooms. Given the origins of the game and its current international spread, the hypothesis was formulated that Italian – acknowledged to be a “democratic language” (Pulcini, 2002, p. 153) – had borrowed a conspicuous number of Anglicisms in the field. The search in the main Italian dictionaries yielded very few terms, none of which peculiar to this variety of poker. However, two subsequent editions of the FIGP regulations show a wide adoption of English key terms, which in some cases are prevalent and in others coexist with their Italian equivalents, thus providing instances of semi-integrated Anglicisms. Most borrowings are non-adapted, but a degree of uncertainty remains in the use of the ‘-s’ as against uninflected plurals and in the change of word class or gender. While in the regulations only one verb, ‘fold’, is adapted by adding Italian inflections, a summary review of specialised blogs and forums has revealed that players and commentators predominantly use adapted forms of English verbs denoting actions and strategies. As many players aspire to participate in world events, one of the main reasons for the prevalence of Anglicisms even in intralingual Italian exchanges is likely to be the language policy of the Tournament Directors Association, which requires terminological uniformity and mandates the exclusive use of English in US tournaments. The scope of such online specialised discourse and the peculiarities of both the medium and the genre would require, however, further ad-hoc sociolinguistic investigation so as to analyse the processes at work, the level of lexical absorption and the dynamics of interaction.

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