

Recovering the European Dimension in the Philosophy of Language The Italian Analytic Tradition

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Abstract: The paper presents the history of Italian scholars and research centres that contributed to the emergence of the analytic philosophy of language in Italy in the second half of the twentieth century. After a brief description of the work completed in the fifties, I describe the formation of a network of people interested in those contents and methods, trace the origins to the influence of different centres of research in the US and Europe and shortly describe the main events, seminars, conferences and meetings linked to different universities and research groups. These early efforts created a background from which students and junior scholars could evolve and develop original research in that area. The central idea is that the work on philosophy of language we made in Italy is part of a wider attempt at reconnecting networks of interactions among philosophers in Europe that were alive *before* the Nazi period.

Keywords: Analytic philosophy; Philosophy of Language; Linguistics; Wittgenstein; European Culture.

1. *Prelude: from the aftermath of the Second World War to the sixties*

During the first half of the twentieth century, Italian academia was mostly identified with idealism (Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile), whereas after the Second World War, the academic environment was mostly devoted, besides ancient and medieval phi-

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¹ I asked some friends for help to check for any shortcomings and gaps in this short history and owe a lot to Paolo Leonardi, Diego Marconi, Marco Santambrogio and Marina Sbisà, who read the first draft. Mistakes and omissions remain in my own responsibility. The decision to close the history at the beginning of the nineties makes this paper an archaeological piece of evidence of a heroic period where people worked with letters, typewriters and photocopies; without the internet and with a lot of train travel; and when crossing the Channel to the White Cliffs of Dover was easier than it is now after Brexit.

losophy, to classic German philosophy, including Kant, Nietzsche, existentialism and hermeneutics. On account of the Italian secondary school curriculum, philosophy was often intended as a history of philosophy and the main “novelties” almost inevitably consisted in the study of texts by Jaspers, Heidegger and Gadamer, with some reference to Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Paul Ricoeur. Analytic philosophy was not widely considered as such and was often ostracised, with notable exceptions, such as the neo-scholastic tradition, which maintained an interest in logical matters. It is not by chance that the first Italian works on Gödel’s theorem were by Evandro Agazzi (Agazzi, 1961) and Francesca Rivetti Barbò (Rivetti Barbò, 1964), who studied at the Catholic University in Milan with a strong neo-scholastic tradition. In addition, even Marxism, although often distrustful of analytic philosophy, promoted a positive attitude towards scientific thinking. However, it took half a century to place the philosophy of language into Italian academia. Symbolically, we may date its origin to just after the war in 1948.

Two years before Austin’s English translation, Ludovico Geymonat published an Italian translation of Frege’s *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* with the title, *Aritmetica e Logica*, the first of several translations of Frege’s works. The young Geymonat had visited the Vienna Circle and had been well received as a student of Giuseppe Peano, who was much better appreciated in Vienna than in the Italian philosophical environment. In Vienna, he realised the importance of Gottlob Frege and prepared his translation in the late thirties. Unfortunately, the work was rejected by the so-called *Minculpop*, the Ministry of Popular Culture of the fascist government: the decision, in short, was something like, “Why publish a German mathematician when we Italians have Giuseppe Peano?”. Later, Geymonat joined the resistance against fascism, and the publication of Frege had to wait until the end of the war. I was happy to receive a first edition of the book from my father-in-law, who had studied analysis with Geymonat in Cagliari. Geymonat was also instrumental in creating a background of anti-idealist philosophy in Italy and support for greater attention to the scientific method. He was among the promoters of the *Centro di Studi Metodologici* in Torino from 1946², together with Nicola Abbagnano, Norberto

² Cfr. Lecaldano (2020), who quotes Rossi and Viano according to whom some – if

Bobbio, Guido Morpurgo Tagliabue, Enzo Paci, Ferruccio Rossi Landi, Uberto Scarpelli and others. Bobbio later presided over a group for the development of analytic philosophy of law, in which Scarpelli had an important role, since a debate with Visalberghi about Hare's *language of morals* published in the *Rivista di filosofia* in the mid-fifties. Rossi Landi, translator of Charles Morris and Gilbert Ryle, later put forth views about the social division of linguistic labour (1968) that antedate Putnam's ideas.

Another relevant society with which philosophers of language had a lot to share, and did share in its many conferences, was the *Italian Society for Logic and the Philosophy of Science* (SILFS), founded in 1951 and linked to the Italian tradition of mathematical logic fostered by Peano and his school³. The connection with SILFS was to become a constant, given an overlapping of theoretical interests, especially in the philosophy of logic and – later with Vittorio Somenzi – with cognitive science and artificial intelligence. Some philosophers of language would participate to the life of the society (sometimes after having taught philosophy of science) and engage in a continuous collaboration with its members.

In 1953 – in the quinquagenary of Russell's *Principles of Mathematics* – Mario Dal Pra, the editor of the *Rivista Critica di Storia della Filosofia*, devoted a monographic issue of his journal to Russell, who soon became one of the most frequently translated contemporary British authors in Italy. I still have many paperback translations of Russell's in my library (although I lost the translation of his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, which was one of my first philosophical reads). Between the fifties and the sixties, we find, besides translations of Russell and classics in linguistics, such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky, an idiosyncratic row of translations of many important authors in the philosophy of language: John L. Austin, Alfred J. Ayer, Max Black, Rudolf Carnap, George E. Moore, Charles W. Morris, Willard V.O. Quine, Gilbert Ryle, Peter F. Strawson, Friedrich Waismann and Ludwig Wittgenstein⁴.

not all – members of the *Centro di studi metodologici* «thought that philosophy, a philosophy conceived as analysis of language, or of different scientific languages, could give a strong contribution to its development».

³ For the beginnings of the Society, see <https://www.silfs.it/history/>

⁴ For a list of major Italian translations of works related to philosophy of language, see *Appendice*.

In 1956 Silvio Ceccato designed and built *Adamo II*, the first Italian prototype of artificial intelligence, and also introduced in Italy – with Ferruccio Rossi Landi – the work of Charles Morris. Ceccato in Milan and Somenzi in Rome much influenced future connections between philosophy of language and cognitive sciences (Somenzi, 1965; Fano 1968). In 1965 in Trieste, Guido Morpurgo Tagliabue taught problems of language with reference to Frege, Wittgenstein, Stevenson and Hare, and we arrive here to Wittgenstein's heritage.

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* was first translated by Gian Carlo Maria Colombo SJ in 1954, with a preface by Michael Dummett, before a new 1964 translation by Amedeo Conte that became the standard edition of the *Tractatus* in Italy. Three years later, Mauro Trincherò and Renzo Piovesan translated Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1967). Together with those translations, we find, among the first Italian contributions to the philosophy of language, works dealing with Frege and Wittgenstein: Egidi (1963), Gargani (1966; 1973), Antiseri (1966; 1968), De Mauro (1967), Trincherò (1967), Marconi (1971) and Piana (1973). Most of these works expressed individual interests, rather than those of a coherent research group. Yet, we may see the early beginnings of some future centres of research in the philosophy of language: Bologna, with Alberto Pasquini (translator of Carnap); Padua, with Renzo Piovesan; Rome, with Rosaria Egidi and Tullio De Mauro; Turin, with Mario Trincherò and Diego Marconi; Pisa, with Aldo Gargani; and Milan, with Giovanni Piana and especially Andrea Bonomi, who represented a crucial step forward in the proper development of the philosophy of language. After the publication of his thesis, based on an early interest in Merleau-Ponty (1967) and supervised by Enzo Paci, Bonomi devoted himself to original research on topics in the philosophy of language, beginning with his work on the theories of reference (Bonomi, 1975).

Despite such an early interest in the philosophy of language, the Italian academic environment was still mainly limited to historical research or interests in what would later be called *continental philosophy*. People say that analytic philosophy gives prominence to argument, which was alien to some Italian philosophers at that time, when claiming agreement was sometimes a way to bypass a proper philosophical debate. Bonomi once told me how he used to make fun of professors more committed to appearance than substance.

His method was to state a claim that contradicted the speaker's main point and see what happened: invariably, the speaker would agree with him with great passion, showing that they either did not understand what they had claimed or did not care and just wanted to be recognised as agreeing with an eminent professor of the new generation. I admit, it was fun. But bigger problems were at stake.

As is well known, Nazism compelled most leading philosophers and logicians to leave Europe for the United States or United Kingdom (to name a few: Carnap, Gödel, Hempel, Popper, Reichenbach, Tarski, and Wittgenstein, while Schlick, founder of the Vienna Circle, was assassinated by a young anti-Semitic enthusiast). The network of philosophical research centres in Europe had been destroyed, including those of Vienna (Schlick and Carnap), Berlin (Reichenbach and Gödel), Warsaw (Tarski) and the northern countries, including the *Signific Circle* in Amsterdam (and we cannot forget that meetings for the unity of sciences were held in Paris, too). After the breaking of this network, the philosophical debate in continental Europe became mostly restricted to existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics, cutting off a vivid debate with a rich analytic tradition⁵. As Michael Dummett wrote, «by the end of the Second World War, intercourse between English-speaking philosophers (...) and those who spoke German, Polish, Italian or French was finally silenced» (Dummett, 2007: 22). That notwithstanding, in many countries, including Italy, a few people realised rather early that something had happened in philosophy with the so-called *linguistic turn*. In Italy, a few academic positions began opening in the subject, starting with the linguist Antonino Pagliaro, who in 1955 took the first official chair in the philosophy of language. I appreciated Pagliaro's writings using his remarks on the difference between the two Latin words for *being silent* (*silere* and *tacere*) to comment on the last sentence of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* in my bachelor thesis. The former (*silere*) is typical of nature, while only humans, who can speak, may also use the latter (*tacere*). But

⁵ With the partial exception of the northern countries, on which see Penco (2013) <https://nome.unak.it/wordpress/08-1/c50-review-essay/juha-manninen-and-friedrich-stadtler-eds-the-vienna-circle-and-the-nordic-countries-networks-and-transformations-of-logical-empiricism-vienna-vienna-circle-institute-yearbook-vol-14-spring-er-2010/> (ultima consultazione, 23/12/2021).

this connection between glottology and philosophy was just the beginning. I needed a new and different approach to philosophy. Like many future colleagues and friends, I needed to go abroad.

2. *The seventies and eighties: from the US and UK to Italian universities - a new network*

The influence from abroad: from Pittsburgh to Oxford

To understand the development of the Italian centres of research in the seventies and eighties, it is useful to consider influences from abroad. In the same way in which Geymonat played a significant role in importing the neopositivist attitude of respect for scientific thought in philosophy after spending time with the Vienna Circle, so other scholars had a significant role in importing new trends in the philosophy of language after visiting research centres in the US and UK.

After publishing a book on Wittgenstein (Marconi, 1971), Diego Marconi won a Harkness Fellowship (1974-1976) to go to the US and study at the University of Pittsburgh, where he obtained his PhD with a dissertation on the logic of dialectics: *Contradiction and the language of Hegel's dialectic: A study of the Science of Logic* (University microfilm 1980). He had already published a book in Italian on the formalisation of dialectics (Marconi, 1979), which helped to discuss topics about Hegel's dialectic in a light that was far from the traditional discussion, anticipating works by other Italian scholars, such as Francesco Berto (Berto, 2009) and Ermanno Bencivenga (Bencivenga, 2011), and following a line of thought that would lead to the directions of work of Graham Priest. Marconi – who studied with Nicholas Rescher, Wilfrid Sellars and Richmond Thomason – brought to the Italian environment a new style of discussion and soon became, together with Andrea Bonomi, a point of reference for Italian philosophers working on the philosophy of language and on Wittgenstein (Marconi, 1971; Andronico-Marconi-Penco, 1981; Marconi, 1987; 1997) and Quine (Marconi 1975). Working on the difference between dictionaries and encyclopaedias (Marconi, 1986/1982), he created a connection with topics treated by Umberto Eco. With *Lexical Competence* (1997), he provided a background for discussing the main trends in the philosophy of language with

a new perspective connected with neurophysiological data. Some of his students, such as Aldo Antonelli and Carlotta Pavese, went to teach in the US. The link with Pittsburgh was later followed by scholars, such as Michele Marsonet, Carlo Penco, Maria Carla Galavotti (Centre for the Philosophy of Science) or Margherita Benzi (Carnegie Mellon University).

Among the early links with the US, we also have Paolo Leonardi, Francesco Orilia, Alessandro Zucchi and Mario Alai. Leonardi won a scholarship of the National Research Center (CNR) in 1975-1976 to go to the University of California, in Berkeley. There, he studied with Charles J. Fillmore, Paul Grice, George Lakoff and John Searle, among others, all of whom became outstanding speakers at conferences in Italy that were organised by Leonardi, who would play a crucial role in the development of the philosophy of language in Italy. Orilia had his PhD at Indiana University in 1986 before going back to Italy, to teach at the University of Macerata. Zucchi, before going back to Milano, had his M.A. (1985) and PhD (1989) at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst with Barbara Hall Partee and Edmund Gettier III. Alai, after studying at the University of Helsinki with George H. von Wright, Jaakko Hintikka, Raimo Tuomela and Ilkka Niiniluoto, went to the University of Maryland, where he earned his PhD in 1989.

However, it was Oxford that had the strongest influence on the development of the Italian philosophy of language, becoming a centre of attraction for many Italian scholars, among whom were Paolo Casalegno, Roberta De Monticelli, Michele Di Francesco, Giulio Giorello, Marco Mondadori, Ernesto Napoli, Eva Picardi, Marco Santambrogio and Marina Sbisà. The first was likely Marina Sbisà, who, under the influence of Renzo Piovesan and before completing her Master dissertation, went to Oxford in 1970 to study the manuscript of *How to do Things with Words* (which had been published in 1962). In 1972, she worked with J.O. Urmson on the second edition, which came out in 1975. In Oxford, she met Gareth Evans, who gave her a copy of Grice's lectures, *Logic and Conversation*, which were yet to be discovered by the wider public. Although her first book (Sbisà, 1975) was on Wittgenstein, she soon became the best-known Italian researcher in pragmatics, beginning with her anthology on speech acts (Sbisà, 1978) on which she was supported by Maria Elisabeth Conte, an expert in German textual linguistics.

I got in touch with Marina Sbisà about a second Italian edition of Austin's masterpiece; the old Italian title was theoretically wrong (*When saying is doing* was the title, but every saying is a doing), so we decided on a literal translation of the title. We worked together in Trieste, attending to both the needs of her newborn and the translation Carla Villata was making with the help of the revolutionary *Oxford concordance program* (which today would look like an elementary tool for everybody, but it was revolutionary in 1987). The translation of Austin's philosophical papers was later released by Paolo Leonardi in 1993.

Still in the early seventies, Marco Santambrogio, who had written his thesis with Ludovico Geymonat, after completing his Master Science in logic and philosophy of mathematics at the University of London, went to Oxford to study with Michael Dummett. His keen understanding of the main problems in the philosophy of language soon made him one of the first Italian contributors to journals, such as *The Journal of Philosophy*, *Nous*, *Synthese* and *Dialectica*. At the same time, he kept translating important works by Dummett (*Truth and Other Enigmas*), Kripke (*Naming and Necessity*; *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*) and Quine (*The Ways of Paradox*), on whom he later edited a collection of essays, together with Paolo Leonardi.

Michael Dummett also had a strong influence on other Italian philosophers, such as Eva Picardi, Roberta De Monticelli and the present author. Eva Picardi went to study with Dummett in Oxford, where she earned her PhD. (1984). She pre-printed a version of her dissertation, *Assertibility and Truth* (1981), before collecting some of her essays in 1994. Picardi invited Michael Dummett to Bologna many times, as I did to Genoa. Dummett liked to come to Italy, especially before smoking was forbidden on planes. In Bologna he used to play *tarocchi* in several local taverns, but he also gave a series of lectures on *The origin of analytic philosophy* in a magnificent room of the university, the oldest in Europe. The lectures were first published in 1988 in the journal *Lingua e Stile*, where Eva Picardi was on the editorial committee. Picardi soon became one of the most followed teachers in Bologna, from which her students went to different parts of Italy, as well as abroad (among them was Annalisa Coliva, who would have gone to teach in Irvine, California, after founding with others the *Cogito Center of Philosophy* in Bologna).

Her promotion of a row of translations for the publisher *Il Mulino* played a large role in spreading the philosophy of language in Italian universities: students had the opportunity to read the essential works of Davidson, Fodor, Grice and Dummett in Italian.

Roberta De Monticelli also went to study with Michael Dummett in the late seventies and early eighties. One of her first books (1982) was a discussion of Fregean and Wittgensteinian themes. After publishing works on Frege and Dummett and on interpretations of modal logic with Michele Di Francesco (De Monticelli – Di Francesco, 1983), she later developed a propensity for phenomenology. Di Francesco instead continued on topics more linked to the philosophy of language with his book on sense and reference (Di Francesco, 1986) and his works on Russell (Di Francesco, 1990; 1991), on whom already we had a monograph by Orilia (Orilia, 1984), comparing Russell's ontology and Meinong's one.

After attending a series of lectures of Timothy Smiley on Frege in Cambridge, I went to Oxford in 1979 with a NATO scholarship to study with Michael Dummett. At that time, Dummett was writing his book on Frege's philosophy of mathematics; however, as I had just completed my Italian dissertation on Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics (Penco, 1981), I chose to change and work on the philosophy of language. I later translated Dummett's first book *Frege, Philosophy of Language* in an abridged edition that was strongly criticised in a review by Eva Picardi (but Eva's criticism was also the beginning of a long-lasting cooperation, which produced new Italian translations of Frege's works in 2001 and 2019). I remember Dummett's sharp reaction against the recently published Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, which he strongly criticised. Among my curious memories is a post-lunch sherry with Alfred J. Ayer, who was apparently bewildered at still receiving royalties for his *Language, Truth and Logic*, which had immediately become a classic and been translated into Italian in 1961.

Last but not least, the Wittgenstein Symposia in Kirchberg, beginning in 1976, were events where Italian philosophers not only entered the international arena, but also fostered new projects and discussed their views on the situation of philosophy in Italy. The atmosphere much contributed to an intense exchange of ideas. I have vivid memories of the first conferences and the very *heated* discussions taking place there. I still remember the reaction of Eva

Picardi against Hao Wang on Michael Dummett's philosophy and the intense discussion that followed. We also had the opportunity to take very nice walks in the woods around Kirchberg, with great mushrooms and terrible ticks.

The existence of a series of meetings in nearby Austria suggests a synthetic comment on what happened in those years, which may dissolve ambiguities about the results of our efforts. The connection with research centres in the US and UK did *not* mean that Italian philosophy of language was becoming "Anglo-American". On the contrary, we might say that we contributed with others to the recovery of the European network of philosophical discussion, that had been in place before the Nazi period. Many references within so-called Anglo-American philosophy brought us back to leading figures of European philosophical culture: Carnap, Frege, Gödel, Husserl, Reichenbach, Schlick, Tarski, Waismann and Wittgenstein, to name a few. The main difference is that the new European network is now much wider and includes American philosophers.

*Main centres of research and the creation of a network.
The Northern Italian Connection*

As anticipated, Milan was a propulsive centre of research in the philosophy of language due to the work of Andrea Bonomi. His anthology, *La struttura logica del linguaggio* (*The logical structure of language*) (Bonomi, 1973), was crucial in spreading the philosophy of language in Italy. It contained, besides fundamental papers by Frege, Russell and Quine, a series of papers by the major contemporary philosophers of language (Ajdukiewicz, Bar-Hillel, Carnap, Church, Davidson, Donnellan, Husserl, Kaplan, Kripke, Lewis, Prior, Schlick, Searle, Stalnaker, Strawson and Tarski). For most of us, that collection was the first introduction to the contemporary debate in the philosophy of language. Bonomi had also been very interested in linguistics and the Chomskyan revolution: before working on issues of reference, he had published a book on transformational grammar with Gabriele Usberti (Bonomi-Usberti, 1971), who would later publish a book on different topics in semantics (Usberti, 1980). Later, the philosophy of language became Bonomi's main interest: after *Vie del Riferimento* (*Ways of Reference*, Bonomi, 1975), he soon published on fiction (Bonomi, 1979) and on indirect

speech (Bonomi, 1983). In the seventies, scholars connected with Milan's Department of Philosophy started a series of new translations, following Corrado Mangione's enriched version of the translation of Frege's essays (including the *Begriffsschrift*). Among the books most widely read and discussed were translations of Leonard Linsky's *Reference and Modality*, David Lewis' *Convention*, Peter F. Strawson's *Individuals* and a very nice anthology on possible worlds edited by Daniela Silvestrini (1978), soon followed by Santambrogio's translation of Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* (1982) and of Dummett's *Truth and Other Enigmas* (1986). With Andrea Bonomi, the Department of Philosophy at the University of Milan became a centre of meetings in the philosophy of language, where Bonomi, Clotilde Calabi, Casalegno, De Monticelli, Michele Di Francesco, Elisa Paganini, Santambrogio, Silvestrini and Usberti were the core to which people from other universities, including myself, were unavoidably attracted. We cannot forget the connection with the Catholic University in Milan, where Savina Raynaud studied in the seventies. She went to Trieste to work with Rivetti-Barbò and went back much later (in 1994) to her former University, after becoming researcher in linguistic in the eighties. Later, she had to become an element of mediation between analytic philosophy and other trends in the philosophy of language.

A new link between the philosophy of language and linguistics was prompted in 1976 by the conference on *Languages and formalisations* of the Italian Society of Linguistics, where, among others, we find Marconi, Massimo Moneglia, Luigi Rizzi and Marco Santambrogio. A year later, one of the major Italian academic institutions, the *Accademia della Crusca*, with the support of the Florentine linguist Giovanni Nencioni and the collaboration (among others) of Moneglia, Emanuela Cresti (then a student of Nencioni), Bonomi and Paolo Parrini, promoted a series of conferences in Florence with the following topics: *Generative analysis of natural language* (1977), *Anaphora* (1978) and *Verbal tense and quantified structures in logical form* (1979). This series of meetings contributed to spreading interest in the philosophy of language in Italy. The *Crusca* meetings no longer involved philosophers after the late seventies. However, other initiatives followed a few years later, starting with Marco Santambrogio, who, together with Paolo Casalegno, set up a seminar on Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and*

Private Language at the University of Bologna in 1983, where Santambrogio was also then teaching. After the success of that meeting, others followed, beginning with a seminar at the University of Padua in 1984 on Barwise and Perry's *Situational Semantics* with the participation of many of us, including Ernie Lepore, who was in touch with Bonomi.

In addition to Milan and Bologna, Padua was a university with a strong analytic tradition, fostered by the Aristotelian scholars Enrico Berti and Mario Mignucci, and developed by younger philosophers, such as Paolo Leonardi and Daniele Giaretta. In 1977, the Padua group had organised a meeting in Brixen/Bressanone, a wonderful place, where, together with most of the friends quoted above, I met Dummett and Paul Grice for the first time. Later, many UK and US philosophers came to Padua and Venice to give lectures, including David Wiggins, Charles Parsons, Hector-Neri Castañeda, John Searle, Wolfgang Künne, Nino Cocchiarella, George Bealer, James Higginbotham, Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, Kaplan, Kripke, Keith Donnellan, Joseph Almog and George Wilson. Venice was also influenced by these new inputs, creating new interests in the philosophy of language in young philosophers, such as Luigi Perissinotto, who would later (Perissinotto, 1985; 1991) begin his contributions with two volumes on Wittgenstein.

Trieste too was part of this Northern connection: there worked Marina Sbisà. Also thanks to her connections to the groups in Padua and Bologna, she kept herself updated and developed her version of speech act pragmatics (Sbisà, 1989) and its application to conversation and texts, and later on, her proposal (again both theoretical and applicative) on implicit meaning.

However, the Bologna environment was special: Alberto Pasquinelli had created a background of analytic philosophy with teaching and translating works by Rudolf Carnap, especially *Meaning and Necessity*, and young philosophers such as Picardi, Leonardi and Santambrogio influenced Eco's partial reception and support of the analytic philosophy of language⁶: with the help of Leonardi,

⁶ To understand Eco's complex attitude towards both analytic philosophy and the philosophy of language, see Eco (1997; 2016), a report of a talk at the 2004 conference of the Italian Society for Analytic Philosophy (SIFA) in Genoa, where I was happy to invite him (and he was happy I found him an isolated hotel in the historical centre, far from the

Santambrogio and Patrizia Violi, Eco, who also taught in Bologna, began organising stimulating conferences at his research centre in the Republic of San Marino, involving John Searle, Daniel Dennett, Gilles Fauconnier, Jerry Fodor, Philip Johnson-Laird, Hilary Putnam (among others) and, eventually, Quine (in 1990), with wide participation⁷ from Andrea Bonomi, George Boolos, Hector Neri Castañeda, Carlo Cellucci, Maria Luisa Dalla Chiara, Donald Davidson, Dagfinn Føllesdal, Roger Gibson, James Higginbotham, Dirk Koppelberg, Ernest Lepore, Fabrizio Mondadori, Ernesto Napoli, Charles Parsons, Hilary Putnam, Nathan Salmon, Barry Stroud, Giuliano Toraldo di Francia and Bas C. Van Fraassen. Umberto Eco gave a provocative talk involving a huge, white, living rabbit shouting *Gavagai* and Quine was absolutely efficient, answering each challenge of the numerous contributors. Someone was missing, however. When Eco had invited Quine to the conference in his honour, Quine had said something like: “Invite whomever you please, except Kripke”. Well, Kripke was invited later (1997), and the Italian analytic community greatly appreciated his presence, whereas the local cooks did not, holding food without pork to be out of the question, just as food *with* pork is out of the question in kosher cuisine. Later, it was David Kaplan’s turn, and in Bologna, besides Dummett and Kripke, we had seminars with Tyler Burge, Stephen Yablo and Ruth G. Millikan, among others.

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm for the reconnection with a pre-war living discussion, the heavy inheritance of the Italian academia did not foster the new directions of research. I still remember a colleague at my university saying that Davidson was not quite a philosopher, and even at the University of Turin, Marconi found great difficulties in developing a new philosophical environment. He eventually decided to try other ways, such as a curriculum in philosophy and computer science, which was quite successful, training some future philosophers of language and mind, as well as psychologists, linguists and computer scientists (e. g. Anna Goi, Cristina Meini, Giancarlo Mezzanatto, Alfredo Paternoster).

admiring audience, and just asked for an informal dinner with friends at *I tre Merli* in the old port, where he bought some *farinata* – a typical dish of Genoa and Alessandria, his home town – to bring home).

⁷ Cfr. Leonardi-Santambrogio (1995).

Eventually, Marconi went to teach in a new university founded in Piedmont, together with several analytic philosophers who moved there: Marconi, Casalegno, Michele Di Francesco, Pater-noster and, later, Alberto Voltolini. For a while, it was possible to think that a genuine centre of analytic philosophy could develop there. Indeed, the first national doctoral program in the analytic philosophy of language (see below) had its headquarter in Vercelli, but then, career developments and other factors led most Vercelli philosophers to move to other universities. Marconi himself went back to Turin, which eventually would become a new pole of attraction, due to the presence of Alberto Voltolini, Enzo Crupi, Andrea Iacona, Guido Bonino, Paolo Tripodi, Ian Sprenger (among others) and the creation of the Center for Logic, Language and Cognition⁸.

Between Genoa and Pisa, two old maritime republics

Tuscany was another centre of meetings linked to the philosophy of language and logic. I already described the role of *Accademia della Crusca* in Florence; in addition, we should not forget the strong presence of mathematical logic in Florence with the logicians Ettore Casari, Maria Luisa Dalla Chiara, Andrea Cantini, Sergio Bernini and others such as Alberto Peruzzi, who in the seventies worked at the Grammar Center of the *Accademia della Crusca* before going to study with Jerrold Kats at New York Graduate Center in the eighties. On the other hand, there was strong interest in Wittgenstein both in Florence (with Michele Ranchetti and Marino Rosso) and in Pisa (with Gargani, who edited in 1983 a collection on Wittgenstein, including papers by Egidi, McGuinness, Picardi, Sbisà and others). In Pisa, we have one of the very few highly selective Italian university colleges (the *Scuola Normale Superiore*): there, since the late seventies, young philosophers, such as Casalegno, Ernesto Napoli, Enrico Moriconi, Mauro Mariani, Pasquale Frascolla and Carlo Marletti, had formed discussion groups in the philosophy of language and logic. There was a background to that: at the University of Pisa, Vittorio Sainati and Renzo Raggiunti had founded the journal *Teoria*, where Casalegno, Mariani, Marletti and

⁸ For further information, see <https://www.llc.unito.it/>.

Moriconi would contribute to special issues on *Logic and Philosophy of language*; however we also find issues of the journal devoted to Wittgenstein edited in 1985 by Gargani and Brian McGuinness, who would have taught in his latest years in Siena, where Usberti also taught. Pisa was also a very lively cultural environment because of the presence of a centre of computational linguistics directed by Antonio Zampolli (who, to my surprise, was fond of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*). It organised relevant conferences: I vividly recall one (1972) at which I heard Winograd's presentation of SHRDLU. Tuscany was also full of opportunities thanks to wonderful places for conferences, such as Florence and the Chartreuse of Pontignano, near Siena, where Gabriele Usberti and others set up meetings on foundational problems in the philosophy of language (see e. g. Usberti 1991).

In the sixties, Genoa was a typical Italian university, where the most original teaching was on Heidegger (I remember studying *Sein und Zeit* and *Unterwegs zur Sprache*). However, it also had one of the first courses of mathematical logic in Italy, together with Florence: Evandro Agazzi (Agazzi, 1961) had edited an Italian translation and comment to Gödel's theorem and had published a nice elementary introduction to logic (Agazzi, 1964). Logic teaching became a solid tradition in Genoa with Dario Palladino (who would have a great influence on later scholars, such as Marcello Frixione and Daniele Porello). In the early seventies, Agazzi organised a series of seminars on the notion of meaning involving linguistic, philosophical and logical issues (see Agazzi, 1979) and founded in the early eighties a PhD program in Philosophy of science with the Universities of Bologna, Firenze, Genova, Milano and Trento. From there many scholars with various interests also in the philosophy of logic and language would have gone to teach in Italy and Europe. During these years he promoted meetings, both in Genoa and in nearby Santa Margherita, to which outstanding analytic philosophers were invited. At these seminars I met Diego Marconi: with him, we came to believe that – as Italy was at the periphery of the analytic community and the general situation of philosophical academia in Italy was so difficult – probably the most urgent business was to create a background. For this reason (among others), I spent a lot of time translating into Italian important works by Austin (with Marina Sbisà), Dummett, Ernst

Tugendhat and – in a collection edited with Andrea Bottani in 1992 – papers by John Barwise, Nuel Belnap, Robert Brandom, Davidson, Dummett, Edmund Gettier, Barbara Hall Partee, Kaplan, Kripke, Dag Prawitz, Arthur Prior and Putnam, intended to integrate the work introduced by Bonomi with his 1973 anthology, of which I already pointed out the crucial role for our community. As the reader knows, I was not alone in the effort. In the *Appendix*, I include a list of Italian translations to testify the work undertaken in those years when Italian students were not as accustomed to reading in English as they are today.

Central and Southern Italy

The philosophy of language had a different history in central and southern Italy: there, we see much overlap with structuralism, semiotics, linguistics and post-modernist thought. Yet in Rome Rosaria Egidi kept working on Frege and Wittgenstein, playing an inestimable role in organising conferences on the philosophy of language in Rome and fostering interest towards analytic philosophy in her students, among whom were Massimo Dell’Utri and Mario De Caro and before them, Guido Frongia, who contributed a nice essay on Wittgenstein in 1985, developing an interest never abandoned by Egidi, who had just published a short collection on Wittgenstein with Gargani and Conte (Gargani, 1983). Furthermore, in Rome, Eugenio Lecaldano, after his dissertation on Hare’s *Language of Morals* with Visalberghi, was spreading theories of linguistic analysis. In the seventies a young Roberto Cordeschi, after discussing a thesis on Gödel’s theorem with Lucio Lombardo Radice as supervisor, followed the lead of Somenzi and began working on cybernetics and artificial intelligence, fostering the connection between philosophers of language and cognitive sciences (Somenzi – Cordeschi, 1986). Tullio De Mauro was also an interlocutor⁹. I remember our common concern with Eco’s claim that logic was just one semiotic system among others and very long and interesting discussions with him and Ferruccio Rossi Landi.

In Lecce, a student of Ferruccio Rossi Landi, Carlo Dalla Pozza,

⁹ On the role of Tullio De Mauro in the history of linguistic and philosophy of language in Italy, see Gensini (2020).

was, though quite alone, a world in himself. When I went to teach Philosophy of science in Lecce in the eighties, I found Carlo to be more than a friend; discussing with him was always rewarding. In addition I had access to his library, which was the best library in the philosophy of language I could imagine, and his lectures were a show, as he also was a champion in Greco–Roman wrestling and an expert in Wing Chun. He was as precise with physical strokes as intellectual ones: when he submitted to *Erkenntnis* his work with Claudio Garola on the formalisation of the pragmatics of assertion (Dalla Pozza – Garola, 1995), the paper was accepted as it was, for my pride and envy. In 1992, we organized a workshop on new trends in formal languages with contributions, among others, of Michele Abrusci, Carlo Cellucci, Marcello Frixione, Fausto Giunchiglia, Leonardo Lesmo, Diego Marconi, Dario Palladino (Dalla Pozza – Penco, 1993). Southern Italy was also active in inviting philosophers of language, as with a later conference on the philosophy of Michael Dummett, organised by Brian McGuinness and Gianluigi Olivieri (1994). But that was in the mid-nineties, and some significant events had happened before.

3. *The nineties: Consolidation and shrinking of the philosophy of language*

At the beginning of the nineties, two events were crucial in consolidating the Italian philosophy of language: the creation, in 1991, of the *Italian Society for Analytic Philosophy* (SIFA), and a collective attempt to provide a *canon of philosophy of language*, both in books and in the organisation of university teaching.

SIFA was born in 1991 – a year after the founding of the European Society for Analytic Philosophy – and was chaired by Eugenio Lecaldano. Among the founding members, along with Rosaria Egidi there were four philosophers of language: Paolo Leonardi, Diego Marconi, Eva Picardi and Marco Santambrogio. At the time, there were two main trends within the society: philosophy of language and moral philosophy/philosophy of law. A year later in Rome, Lecaldano and Egidi organised a conference on holism after the publication of Fodor's and Lepore's book (1992). The philosophy of language was still central when I organised the first official conference of the

Society in 1994¹⁰ and even later, as is testified by the archive of the first ten years of the society¹¹. At the first SIFA conference, there were only three non-Italian speakers: Jean Pierre Dupuy, Ernie Lepore and Martine Nida-Ruemeling. But soon, the SIFA conferences abandoned the local setting and became regular international meetings, with many non-Italian invited speakers and contributors (to list some: Robert Brandom, Joao Branquinho, Johnathan Dancy, Michael Dummett, Tim Crane, Pascal Engel, Hans Johann Glock, Andreas Kemmerling, Mike Martin, John McDowell, Kevin Mulligan, Elisabeth Pacherie, David Papineau, Gianfranco Soldati, Timothy Williamson and Crispin Wright). In 1997, I contributed to create a web page for the society, which is still active, providing information on the main conferences¹². From 1991, with a meeting with Spanish and Italian philosophers in Venice, Leonardi organised a row of European meetings in Analytic philosophy (“Italian–Spanish”, “Italian–French” and “Italian–German” meetings); together with Joao Branquino and Josep Corbi, I started a series of *Latin meetings in analytic philosophy*¹³. We thus again contributed to the formation of a European network, of which Italians were an active part.

However, we had a problem. We must keep in mind that for a long time in Italy, analytic philosophy had been almost synonymous with the philosophy of language. Four philosophers of language were among the first presidents of SIFA (Egidi, Marconi, Penco and Picardi). However, with the development of the society, it became more and more evident that the philosophy of language was just one particular field within analytic philosophy¹⁴, a field that had reached its zenith in the seventies and eighties, while becoming more and more interconnected with the cognitive sciences, philosophy of mind, and epistemology (Eco-Santambrogio-Violi, 1986).

¹⁰ The papers of the conference can be downloaded at http://www.sifa.unige.it/?page_id=2879 (ultima consultazione, 5/10/2021).

¹¹ See the archive at: http://www.sifa.unige.it/?page_id=2688 (ultima consultazione, 5/10/2021).

¹² Further information at [sifa.unige.it](http://www.sifa.unige.it).

¹³ See: http://www.sifa.unige.it/?page_id=449 (ultima consultazione, 5/10/2021)

¹⁴ D’Agostini-Vassallo, 2002 will present a history of Analytic Philosophy, of which Philosophy of Language is just the first of twelve sections.

In the process, philosophy of language was losing its appeal as the queen of philosophy, partly supplanted by metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and the cognitive sciences. I still believe that philosophy of language is the queen, lasting as long as Queen Elizabeth, but I am more and more alone, being surrounded by students more interested in ontology and experimental philosophy. The ontological turn probably begun with the wonderful book, *Holes*, published in 1994 by Roberto Casati and Achille Varzi, who had to become one of the first Italian contributors in analytic metaphysics.

With the shrinking of the role of philosophy of language, we needed, on the one hand, some recognised *standard* or a kind of syllabus of the main themes and authors of the discipline and, on the other hand, some more specific organisation to foster philosophy of language proper and not generally analytic philosophy. To satisfy these two requirements, Santambrogio, Leonardi, and Marconi provided a new starting point.

Concerning the first requirement, Santambrogio, while working on his book (Santambrogio, 1992a), advanced a proposal: writing an *Introduction to the analytic philosophy of language* (Santambrogio, 1992b) with contributions from some *young* scholars. Each of us was to write a chapter on the main figures or topics in the field: Frege's paradigm (Casalegno); origins of formal semantics (Casalegno and Marconi); Wittgenstein after the *Tractatus* (Penco); ordinary language philosophy: meaning and force (Leonardi); W.V.O. Quine (Santambrogio); Donald Davidson: meaning and interpretation (Picardi); Dummett's theory of meaning (Moriconi); logic and linguistics: Montague's contribution (Chierchia); propositional attitudes (Mariani); direct reference (Napoli); and cognitive semantics (Marconi). The book was intended as a presentation of both the fundamental theories and the essential authors of the discipline. In the same year, Picardi (Picardi, 1992) published an introduction to the *elements* of the philosophy of language: meaning and understanding; sentences, propositions and assertions; compositionality; proper names; definite descriptions; meaning and reference; translation and interpretation; synonymy and *oratio obliqua*; and realism and anti-realism. The two books overlapped, but their different structures made them complementary. This first effort to define a canon of the discipline paved the way for other *introductions* with different aims and audiences, which gave – to students at different levels – a

wide possibility to approach the philosophy of language as it was evolving in time: Casalegno, 1997; Chierchia, 1997; Marconi, 1999; Picardi, 1999; Fava-Leonardi-Galasso-Sbisà, 2001; Bianchi, 2003; Penco, 2004; Barbero-Voltolini, 2010; Casalegno, 2011; Frigerio, 2011; Frixione-Vignolo, 2018; Barbero-Caputo 2018; Alai, 2021.

Concerning the second requirement, Leonardi, Marconi and Voltolini, with the help of Gianni Puglisi, founded in 1994 what would be, for more than a decade, the most important institution of the philosophy of language in Italy: a PhD program in the philosophy of language based on a consortium involving the Universities of Turin, Bologna, Padova, Siena, Palermo, Venice and Cagliari (the headquarters would be at the University of Eastern Piedmont at Vercelli). In addition to the institutional teachers Casalegno, Di Francesco, Leonardi, Marconi, Napoli, Picardi, Santambrogio, Usberti and Voltolini, the doctorate included many courses by Roberto Casati, Martin Davies, Maurizio Ferraris, Pasquale Frascolla, Paul Horwich, David Kaplan, Luigi Perissinotto, François Recanati, Dan Sperber, Dirk Van Dalen and Stephen Yablo. It provided a solid formation with both institutional and special courses and strong requirements, including writing papers, taking written exams in logic and linguistics and spending time abroad. The outcome was a formidable asset for the education of young philosophers of language, of which I give a list to the universities where they now teach, just to give a sense of the role the doctorate has played: Carola Barbero (Turin), Andrea Bianchi (Parma), Claudia Bianchi (Milano S. Raffaele), Guido Bonino (Turin), Stefano Caputo (Sassari), Annalisa Coliva (Irvine, USA), Andrea Iacona (Turin), Elisabetta Lalumera (Ferrara), Giorgio Lando (L'Aquila), Vittorio Morato (Padova), Sebastiano Moruzzi (Bologna), Alfredo Paternoster (Bergamo), Elisabetta Sacchi (Milano S. Raffaele), Daniele Sgaravatti (Napoli Federico II) and Massimiliano Vignolo (Genoa). For reasons connected with administrative rules in the Italian system of doctoral studies, the doctorate was discontinued in 2006. However, something of the spirit of the project was kept alive in a section (*Language, Mind, and Cognition*) of the now active FINO Doctoral Consortium of North-Western Italy¹⁵. Moreover, Leonardi set up a series of summer schools on analytic thought, where

¹⁵ Further information at finophd.eu.

some of the main philosophers of language were invited to interact with students: Paul Horwich, Pascal Engel, Paul Boghossian, Wolfgang Kühne, Andreas Kemmerling, Mark Johnson, Stephen Schiffer and Crispin Wright, together with Casalegno, Leonardi, Santambrogio, Voltolini.

With these two enterprises – a shared syllabus of the philosophy of language and the establishment of a strong doctoral teaching style – early attempts at opening Italian culture to the philosophy of language gradually evolved into a network of personal relations and institutional connections, achieving maturity in the nineties and originating a wide community of philosophers of language, now providing the ground for the formation of a new generation of philosophers.

4. *Conclusive remarks*

In this paper, I provided a picture of the building of a network of interests and of a background from which young Italian philosophers could feel they belonged to an ideal community (including Europe and the USA) where the rigorous exchange of ideas and competition in peer-reviewed journals is a recognised international standard. For a period of almost 15 years, a group of colleagues and friends, without any particular unique *leader*, contributed to create this network and are slowly leaving the organisational aspects of the academia to do what retirement helps to do: use more time to read and write.

The reader might have remarked that I mainly quoted books in Italian, although the most interesting pieces of research are papers, typically written in English. However, it would go beyond the possibility of a short paper to give an idea of the original research developed in the last decades of the twentieth century. Publications in Italian were mainly for divulgation and teaching, though now some of our courses are taught in English, also on account of Erasmus students coming to Italy. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Italian philosophy of language was a living community contributing to international research at the intersection of epistemology, philosophy of mind and cognitive science. A list of young philosophers would go beyond the scope of this paper, but

a check-in including the main universities quoted above may confirm the vivacity and flourish of Italian philosophy of language in the present situation. In a discussion with Eva Picardi some years ago, she was wondering whether we might propose a characteristic feature of Italian philosophy of language. I was perplexed. Felice Cimatti (Cimatti, 2015) had tried to define a tradition of “Italian philosophy of language” originated by Dante, Gianbattista Vico, Giacomo Leopardi and Alessandro Manzoni but inspired by de Saussure and Wittgenstein and developed by himself, Agamben, Esposito, and others. A hyper-simplification of the so-called “Anglo-American” tradition allows the author to create a tag for an *alternative* view: according to him, the peculiar feature of the Italian philosophy of language is the claim that language «is not a self-sufficient phenomenon» – a claim on which very few philosophers would disagree. Cimatti (*ibid.*: 16) claims that this hypothetical, peculiarly Italian philosophy of language would explicitly exclude philosophers, such as Marconi, Picardi and Leonardi, whose belonging to what is normally called *philosophy of language* is hard to deny and whose knowledge of Saussure and Wittgenstein (not to speak of Dante, Vico, Leopardi and other Italian cultural figures) is beyond doubt. Why categorise some authors as belonging to, and some as excluded from, what is called –using a definite description– “*the* Italian philosophy of language”? If we followed Russell, the definite description would express existence and uniqueness of the object falling under the description. I do not see any particularly “Italian” feature that can properly single out Italian philosophers of language from others. In the Italian Society for the Philosophy of Language (SFL) we have various viewpoints and many directions of research. There is a family resemblance with many interconnected topics, but I would not go beyond that. Nationalism has no place in philosophy: what matters are solid arguments and original ideas. I believe that time will tell whether the environment we contributed to create in Italy will be sufficient to produce some good pieces of philosophy of language or of philosophy *tout court*.

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Appendix

Italian translations of authors and texts of philosophy of language in the second half of twentieth century

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