

Italian Immigration to Argentina in the Nineteenth Century:

Cocoliche and Lunfardo

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Resumen

El objeto de este trabajo es profundizar en el tema de la inmigración italiana a la Argentina y encontrar una respuesta a una pregunta central: ¿por qué deciden migrar las personas? Es decir, ¿por qué decidieron migrar muchos italianos a lo largo del siglo diecinueve a la Argentina y no a otro país? Asimismo, este trabajo tiene como objeto demostrar algunas de las dificultades que padecieron ciertos italianos durante su viaje al país y una vez que arribaron al país de destino. También, una sección del trabajo se dedicará al Hotel de Inmigrantes, que fue una institución de gran importancia durante este período. Hoy en día, el hotel es un museo ubicado en Puerto Madero que cualquier persona interesada en el tema puede visitar para informarse más acerca de la inmigración desde diferentes países a la Argentina. Por último, se estudiarán dos fenómenos de suma importancia, a saber, el cocoliche y el lunfardo para ilustrar la gran influencia que tuvieron los italianos en el idioma español, por ejemplo, mediante la creación de nuevas palabras lunfardas que se siguen utilizando. Con el fin de lograr lo antedicho, se han consultado una variedad de escritos y autores.

Palabras clave: migración, italianos, siglo diecinueve, Argentina, Hotel de Inmigrantes, Cocoliche, Lunfardo

Abstract

This paper aims at delving into the topic of Italian immigration to Argentina and to answering one main question: why do people migrate? To be more precise, why did

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many Italians decide to migrate to Argentina throughout the nineteenth century and not elsewhere? Additionally, this paper aims at showing some of the difficulties that certain Italians suffered during their journey to the country and once they arrived at their destination. Also, a section of the paper will be dedicated to the Immigrants' Hotel, which was an important institution during this period. Today, it is a museum located in Puerto Madero, which anyone interested in this topic may visit in order to learn more about immigration to Argentina from all over the world. Lastly, two important phenomena, namely *cocoliche* and *lunfardo* will be studied in order to illustrate the influence of Italians on the Spanish language, for instance, through the creation of words in *lunfardo* that continue to be used today. In furtherance of this, several works and authors have been consulted.

Key words: migration, Italians, nineteenth century, Argentina, Immigrants' Hotel, Cocoliche, Lunfardo

Introduction

Immigration is a phenomenon that has affected cultures and languages since the beginning of time. Societies change, economies fluctuate and wars cause mass destruction and misery, leading people to flee from their country to a new destination country in hopes of a better quality of life. These are only a few answers to the question of why people migrate. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to delve into the topic of Italian immigration during the nineteenth century.

To begin with, the term "migration" will be defined and a general explanation of the most common push and pull factors will be provided in order to explain why people migrate. As regards the specific topic of Italian immigration, the historical context of Italy and Argentina during the aforementioned period will be analysed in order to identify what were the push factors that led Italians to leave and the pull factors that attracted Italians to come to Argentina.

Also, a section will be dedicated to the Immigrants' Hotel, where their trip will be narrated in order to highlight some of the hazards that Italians had to face during their journey. Likewise, their arrival will be described in order to portray what the situation was like for a recently arrived Italian immigrant in Argentina.

Finally, careful research will be carried out to illustrate the impact that their arrival had on the country focusing on, mainly, changes in language brought about by the emergence of *cocoliche*, but particularly, of *lunfardo*, which had an enormous impact on the Spanish language, as it incorporated words to the language that are used today on a daily basis.

Discussion

Defining the Term “Migration”

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provides the following definition of the term “migration”:

Migration is an important factor in the erosion of traditional boundaries between languages, cultures, ethnic groups, and nation-states. Even those who do not migrate are affected by movements of people in or out of their communities, and by the resulting changes. Migration is not a single act of crossing a border, but rather a lifelong process that affects all aspects of the lives of those involved.

(UNESCO, 2017).

This definition indicates that immigration is a phenomenon capable of making changes of great impact on a society that will shape certain aspects of that society, namely, its culture or language. Indeed, such changes began to be seen in the Argentine society when Argentina opened its doors to European immigrants during the nineteenth century.

General Classification of Push and Pull Factors

Having defined the term “migration”, there are two crucial factors that must be considered in order to understand why people migrate. These are known as push and pull factors. According to the BBC, push factors may be defined as the reasons why people migrate, or, in other words, the reasons why people are “pushed away” from their country of origin. Common push factors may include: lack of suitable public services, poverty, lack of fertile land, low quality of life, poor education, economic crisis, political crisis, war, or persecution, either religious or political, in the home country. Conversely, pull factors may be defined as the reasons why a person is “attracted” to a particular country and why he or she may decide to move there. Some examples include: better education, better working conditions, higher employment, better pay, more wealth, political stability, and better land in the destination country. This is merely a general enumeration of the push and pull factors that may provide an answer to the abovementioned question. However, careful research must be conducted to discover what were the push and pull factors that led Italians to migrate in this period. In furtherance of this, the historical context of Italy and Argentina during the nineteenth century will be provided first.

Historical Context

In the late nineteenth century, Italy underwent the Italian Unification, also known as the Italian *Risorgimento*, meaning resurgence. Palmer et al. in the book *a History of the Modern World since 1815* explain how this process of unification was carried out. They state that Prime Minister Cavour of Piedmont was the intellectual author behind the Italian unification. Indeed, Cavour had a plan to unify Italy, however, he believed that first he needed to make the state of Piedmont a “model of progress, efficiency, and fair government that other Italians would admire” (2007, p. 521). The reason for this was that other Italians would want to join Piedmont if it was a more attractive state, making it possible to achieve unification gradually. However, the authors assert that he followed an extremely laic policy, which included reducing the amount of religious holidays, limiting the right of the church to own land, and getting rid of church courts. These changes made many people, particularly the clergy and the Pope, extremely unhappy with Cavour’s program of unification.

The authors explain that Cavour was a realist, therefore, he knew that he needed the help of a greater power to achieve a unified Italy. Thus, he decided to join the Crimean War against Russia in order to gain the support of France and to make agreements with Napoleon III. Napoleon and Cavour agreed that if France helped Italy fight the Austrians, who were in control of the North of Italy, Cavour would give Napoleon Nice and Savoy, which remain part of France to this day. They embarked on war against Austria and they won. As a result, some areas of the North began to join Piedmont as it became more “attractive” after winning a war against such a strong power. This was a great success for Cavour; nevertheless, he still had to unify the southern and the rest of the northern regions.

The same authors claim that, in 1860, Garibaldi and the Red Shirts embarked on an armed expedition to the South in order to achieve its unification. He was successful in joining the Two Sicilies and, in this way, the South and the North united and became the Kingdom of Italy in 1861 with Victor Emmanuel II as the first Italian king. Nevertheless, Venice and Rome did not join the kingdom until later. From these two regions, Rome was the hardest one to annex as the Pope was against the new state. However, it was finally seized in 1871 against the Pope’s will. In this way, ties were officially cut for a long time between the state and the church, which held that, as from that moment, Italians who supported the new state would be deemed as “bad Catholics”.

The situation in Argentina was similar in the sense that it was also a recently formed nation. In the book *Breve Historia de la Argentina*, Romero (2013) briefly explains the situation of Argentina in 1862 through 1880. He establishes that this was a key period in Argentine history, since it was the period in which the republic was finally unified after a long period of fighting between Buenos Aires and the Confederation. Romero (2013) states that three different presidents were in office during this significant period, namely, Mitre (1862-1868), Sarmiento (1868-1874), and Avellaneda (1874-1880).

According to the same author, Mitre succeeded in unifying the republic in 1862 by incorporating Buenos Aires to it. Despite this, a problem remained: the question of where to establish the capital of the new national government. During his term in office, there was a lot of political unrest. For instance, according to Romero (2013), now that the republic was unified, several difficulties arose concerning the provinces, such as the issue of establishing clear frontiers between them in order to avoid conflicts between them or among the provinces and Buenos Aires. Also, the War of the Triple Alliance was triggered, which was a bloody war fought between Paraguay and the Alliance of Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil.

Following the same author, in 1868, Sarmiento succeeded Mitre. During his presidency, there was a great influx of European immigration from many countries, including Italy. His aim was to improve the newly formed country, mainly, by investing in education to civilize the population and by encouraging European immigration in hopes that they would bring foreign ideas to develop the industry of the country and to populate the rural areas to work on the land and improve agriculture, since labor was needed in this field.

The abovementioned argument may be linked to Alberdi's famous quote: "Gobernar es poblar" (Cara-Walker, 1987, p. 39). In *Cocoliche: the Art of Assimilation and Dissimulation among Italians and Argentines*, Cara-Walker (1987) states that, according to Alberdi, Argentina had to be populated soon. Argentina had to attract settlers so as to protect its national boundaries, exploit the land, develop and build new means of transportation, generate business and industry, and increase revenue by means of taxes. The reason for this was that the country's population was still too young, which meant that there was a demographic emptiness that was barring progress and, in the meantime, Argentina could not afford to wait for the Argentine population to grow naturally (Cara-Walker, 1987, p. 39).

Finally, Romero (2013) claims that Avellaneda took office in 1874. While he was President, the problem of where to establish the capital of the new government was solved, since Buenos Aires was officially declared the federal capital of the republic

by an Act of Congress passed on September 20, 1880. Another significant event that took place during his presidency was the famous Conquest of the Desert in which millions of acres of land were gained. Such an event was tragic for the Indians that inhabited these lands, but a blessing for the southern Italians that would arrive in search of a job in the agricultural sector.

In light of the information provided above, Le Bihan (2011) in *Italianismos en el habla de la Argentina: herencia de la inmigración Italiana* asserts that a considerably large immigration wave from Italy began around 1870, which was known as the “aluvión inmigratorio”. He supports this claim with statistics retrieved from the National Institute of Statistics and Census of Argentina (INDEC, for its Spanish acronym), which prove that, according to the national census carried out in 1869, the population of Argentina at this time was of 1,737,076 people, of which 4,1% were Italians. This may not be a very significant percentage; however, it continued increasing. By 1895, the population increased up to 3,954,911 inhabitants, 12.5% of which were Italians and by 1914 the population climbed up to 7,885,237 inhabitants, 2,357,952 of which were foreigners and 19.2% of them were Italians (Le Bihan, 2011, p. 5).

Specific Push and Pull Factors

Taking into account the historical context in both countries, a few conclusions may be drawn to understand why Italians decided to leave Italy after its unification. First of all, many Italians were not in favor of the new monarchy. This was a shared sentiment between both the rich and poor Italians who had lost their land as a consequence of the changes made by Cavour. In addition, the Church would now deem Italians as “bad Catholics” if they supported the new state and this would not allow them to practice their faith without being judged.

Meanwhile, Argentina was beginning to be considered as an attractive destination, particularly because it was still a relatively underpopulated country as it had newly acquired vast fields of fertile lands from which Italians, mainly from the South, could

make a living. In most cases, however, immigrants would be allowed to work the fields but they seldom became owners of the land, nevertheless, the possibility of acquiring land was tempting. In fact, those who were more likely to become landowners were mainly rich Italians from the North who wanted to gain some land to make up for the territory they had lost in Italy after its unification. In addition, Argentina was beginning to improve its industry, thus, there would be work available in the industrial sector. Also, considerable investment to improve education was being made so Italians who planned to bring their families would be able to provide their children with better education. However, not all Italians wanted to move permanently to Argentina. In many cases, Italians came temporarily to make money and eventually return to Italy.

Finally Argentina was, and it still is, a strong Catholic country in which Italians could continue to practice their religion without being judged like they would have back home for supporting the new nation state. Hence, we may infer that these were some of the push and pull factors that encouraged Italians to set sail and come to Argentina in the late nineteenth century.

The Immigrants' Hotel

As it has already been discussed above, Argentina needed immigrants in order to progress, thus, the country opened its doors to immigrants and provided them with everything they needed in order to start a new life. The Immigrants' Hotel was a crucial institution that helped make this possible, as it hosted people from all over the world who came to Argentina, many of which were Italians. In furtherance of learning more about these newly arrived immigrants, a visit was paid to the Immigrants' Hotel on March 27, 2018. Significant information about their voyage and their arrival in the country was provided during the visit. Therefore, these concepts will be shared in this section.

First, the Immigrants' Hotel (see Appendix 1) began to be constructed in 1905 and it was inaugurated in 1911. Once immigrants arrived, the hotel was ready to provide

them with three fundamental things for free: shelter, food, and health. Thus, this hotel was a sort of sanctuary for them. However, there were certain requirements that immigrants needed to comply with in order to be admitted into the hotel. These were: a certificate of good behavior, a certificate of good health, and willingness to work. Unfortunately, those who did not satisfy any of these requirements would be turned away and sent back to their country of origin.

The boat trip to Argentina was the toughest part of their voyage, especially for lower class Italians who travelled in shameful conditions. For instance, the boats carried many more people than their permitted capacity, thus, this was extremely unsafe and uncomfortable for passengers. In addition, trips were overbooked, so the food and medicine supply soon became scarce. For this reason, many Italians would need immediate health care upon arrival, as they would fall ill during the trip. This became a problem when they arrived since, as it has already been mentioned, they needed to submit a certificate of good health in order to be admitted to the hotel. This was a safety measure aimed at avoiding the spread of diseases in the hotel. Thus, those who arrived in poor health conditions would be put in quarantine until they recovered. If they did not recover, they would be sent back to their country.

Additionally, many families were separated during the trip before arriving at their final destination. This occurred because, before the boat arrived at its final destination, it would stop at other ports. Thus, in many cases, parents or children would get off the boat thinking that their family members had already gotten off or that they were right behind them when they were not. This happened very often due to the ridiculous amount of people that were on each boat. Therefore, it was very likely to lose one's relatives in the crowd.

Upon arrival, immigrants were asked to leave their baggage downstairs and they were allowed to take only a small bag upstairs. The purpose of this was to avoid overcrowded rooms. Each room was ready to host 250 people who would sleep in bunk beds (see Appendix 2). These beds were not too comfortable, as they were not like regular beds. They did not have mattresses, bed sheets, or pillows for hygiene

purposes; in fact, they were only made of leather because this way they could be cleaned and disinfected easily. Thus, hygiene was a fundamental priority mainly because these beds were never assigned to the same person. People usually stayed at the hotel for a few nights and then they left, so one never knew who had slept there before them. Again, this was all done to avoid the spread of diseases that could result in deadly epidemics.

The hotel also provided several services aimed at helping newly arrived immigrants. For example, translators were available to help immigrants overcome the language barrier. Also, a bank was located inside the hotel so that immigrants could exchange their currency for Argentine pesos as soon as they arrived and, in this way, avoid being taken advantage of elsewhere. An employment office was also available to help them find a job. This office was extremely effective, since not a single immigrant left the hotel without a job. Any immigrant looking for a job could approach the office and, if possible, he would be assigned a job similar to the one he performed in his country of origin.

Finally, staying at the hotel was not compulsory. Newly arrived immigrants could stay at the hotel for a maximum of five days, which could be extended in case of disease or difficulty to find a job. From here, most Italians who came from the rural areas of Italy, mainly in the South, left for the countryside, as this was the place where labor was needed the most and where they had previously worked in Italy. Conversely, according to Le Bihan, many Italians stayed in Buenos Aires and settled in the port areas of the city such as La Boca, as they were mostly sailors, ship craftsmen, or skippers (2011, p. 8). These groups of Italians mainly came from the northern city of Genoa, which is a port city located in the region of Liguria. Thus, many of them chose to settle in Buenos Aires, as it was a city with similar characteristics where they could still perform the same kind of job they performed in Genoa.

The impact of Italian immigrants on the Argentine society

Cocoliche and Lunfardo

The arrival of Italian immigrants in Argentina had a great impact on various areas of the Argentine society. The main one, and probably the most interesting one, was their influence on the language, which gave birth to what is known as *cocoliche* and *lunfardo*.

In *The Art of Assimilation and Dissimulation*, Cara-Walker (1987) defines *cocoliche* as the “mixed” way of talking of Italian immigrants in Argentina. When Italians arrived in Argentina, they faced a language barrier, thus, they had to “adapt” Italian words to the Spanish language in an effort to be understood. In this way, new words began to appear. According to Le Bihan, it is important to note that *cocoliche* arose mainly among the poor lower classes (2011, p. 16), later giving birth to *lunfardo*, which was considered “a dialect of the slums and the underworld of Buenos Aires” (Cara-Walker, 1987, p. 38), which may be interpreted as the world of crime and illegal practices.

Nevertheless, Mr. Oscar Conde, a reputable source from the Academia Porteña del Lunfardo, contacted on June 9, 2018 (see e-mail in Appendix 3) has refuted several of these claims, concerning the definition of the term *lunfardo* and its origin. First, Oscar Conde opines that *cocoliche* and *lunfardo* actually arose at the same time. Second, he clarifies that *cocoliche* was a transitional way of speaking that was only used by Italian immigrants, thus, *cocoliche* lasted only as long as Italian immigrants lived, therefore, their children did not speak *cocoliche*, they spoke River Plate Spanish. He continues to assert that *lunfardo* is not a dialect. It is really an *argot*²⁸, that is, a “popular vocabulary”. He further explains that this vocabulary was formed due to

²⁸ *Argot*: according to Oscar Conde from the Academia Porteña del Lunfardo, *argot* is a French word, which arose around 1634. He claims that the word seems to be a deformation of the English term “jargon”, which was a term used to refer to a vocabulary that was used among bandits, beggars, and street vendors in France during the XV and the XVI century (2009, 3).

different words and expressions of different immigrant origins, although between 1870 and 1910 a great part of these primarily came from Italian immigrants, as a consequence of their arrival at the country at around that time. Therefore, he states that *lunfardo* really arose when humble *porteños*²⁹, who were in contact with immigrants at the workplace or at school, if we refer to young immigrants, started to take these words and expressions as linguistic borrowings and they included them in their daily vocabulary. Some examples of these words include: *mina*, *laburo*, *bacán*, etc., which are words that we still use today. Hence, *lunfardo* did not fade like *cocoliche* did. It transcended in time.

Next, Mr. Oscar Conde refutes another common misconception that some authors hold, which is that *lunfardo* is an *argot* associated with the criminal world. Oscar Conde affirms that this belief is far from true. In his work named *El Cocoliche y el Lunfardo*, he claims that, for decades, *lunfardo* has been wrongfully deemed to be associated with crime. He further explains that this was due to two main reasons. First, a study performed by Professor Amaro Villanueva (Conde, 2009), who wrote that *lunfardo* had evolved from *lombardo* which meant ‘thief’. Second, the first group of people who were interested in studying this new vocabulary were policemen and criminologists (Conde, 2009, p. 3). Also, he adds that the term *argot* was originally deemed as a vocabulary of criminal nature; thus, many associated other non-French argots, such as *lunfardo*, with this kind of vocabulary. Consequently, this led people to wrongfully associate *lunfardo* with crime. Conde (2009), refutes this belief by asserting that *lunfardo* never was and it is not a vocabulary related to the criminal world. He holds that this is because the words that were introduced to this argot were words that transcended the criminal semantic field (Conde, 2009, p. 4). Conde even questions this fact; he asks, “How could terms such as *mufa* ‘bad mood’, *morfi* ‘food’, *vento* ‘money’, or *pucho* ‘cigarette’ possibly be related to crime?” (Conde, 2009, p. 4). It is evident that he finds this misconception absurd, as he further adds that “one

²⁹ *Porteño*: (Noun) A male native or inhabitant of Buenos Aires. (Adjective) Usually with lower-case initial. Of or relating to the natives or inhabitants of Buenos Aires. (Oxford dictionaries online, 2018).

does not need to be a *chorro* (thief) to use words such as *mina*, *faso*, *atorrante*, or *bardo*” (Conde, 2009, p. 4).

Regarding this issue, it may be important to consider another author’s point of view. In an interview for the magazine *Punto y Coma Hispanoamérica*, José Globello, founder and ex-president of the Academia Porteña del Lunfardo explains that the origin of the word *lunfardo* comes from the word *Lombardo*, which is an adjective referring to a person born in the Italian region of Lombardy (Conde, 2009). He continues to explain that Lombards dedicated themselves to financial activities, therefore, many people viewed them as money-lenders or usurers. Hence, in Argentina, people who were involved in money businesses were referred to as *lombardos* and, later, the term *lombardo* was used to refer to thieves (Conde, 2009, p. 17-18). For this reason, many people wrongly associated *lunfardo* with crime.

In addition to this, it is important to mention the role of tango in the spread of *lunfardo*. According to Conde (2009), from the Academia Porteña del Lunfardo, both theatre plays and also the lyrics of tango songs served as a means of spreading *lunfardo* in newspapers and magazines as from approximately 1910 onwards. Conde (2009) further explains that, due to the spread of this *argot* in such way, it soon became widely popular and it began to be used by inhabitants of large cities of Argentina, such as Buenos Aires, Rosario, La Plata, and even Montevideo in Uruguay, including the outskirts of said cities. Furthermore, according to Globello (Conde, 2009), tango was born in brothels. Therefore, tango had a bad reputation, which led to the creation of poetic song lyrics related to the world of prostitution and the like. In this way, the first tango lyrics featuring words in *lunfardo* began to appear.

Having established the true definition of the term *lunfardo*, several examples of these kinds of words in *lunfardo* will be provided. It should be considered that both southern Italians and northern Italians have coined words in *lunfardo*. Therefore, words introduced by southern Italians were more related to rural life –for instance, the word *apolillar* from Italian *puleggiare* meaning, “to sleep”. Conversely, words introduced by northern Italians, were more related to the life of the higher classes,

since many northern Italians were wealthier and came with money. An example of this is the word *bacán*, from the Italian city of Genoa in the region of Liguria, meaning “a rich man, the boss” (Le Bihan, 2011, p. 31).

Moreover, in *El Cocoliche y el Lunfardo*, Conde provides more examples of words in *lunfardo*. However, before doing so, he explains that *lunfardo* developed due to a variety of Italian languages (*not* dialects) spoken in different regions of Italy that introduced several words into River Plate Spanish, either with their original pronunciation or an adapted one (2009, p. 5-6). First, he provides a few examples of words that come from “standard Italian”, i.e., Italian spoken in the region of Tuscany, located in central Italy. For instance, the words *birra* meaning “beer”, *capo* “boss”, and *manyar* “to eat” (Conde, 2009, p. 7). Second, as regards the northern languages spoken in Italy, he pays special attention to words that came from the region of Liguria, particularly from the city of Genoa. For example, *bagayo* adapted from *bagaggio* meaning “luggage”, *chanta* meaning “an trustworthy person”, and *vento* “money” (Conde, 2009, p. 7). Third, he refers to those words, which came from several regions of southern Italy, such as *escoñar* meaning “to hurt”, *laburar* from *lavurarë* “to work”, and *furca* meaning *horca* which refers to a type of crime taken from Naples, Calabria, and Sicily respectively (Conde, 2009, p. 8). Furthermore, for more examples of words in *lunfardo* that reflect today’s reality see Appendix 4.

Having provided several examples of words in *lunfardo*, it is important to consider that, according to Globello (Conde, 2009), more words in *lunfardo* continue to appear with time to depict new realities. In the previously mentioned interview, he states that new words that emerge in the standard Argentine vocabulary, particularly from Buenos Aires, are analysed and studied by academics at the Academia Porteña del Lunfardo. He provides the word *motochorro*³⁰ as an example of such new words. Thus, Globello claims that these are creations of the Argentine people and, for this reason, he believes that *lunfardo* continues to introduce words into the Argentine vocabulary (Conde, 2009). Hence, *lunfardo* is a living argot, contrary to some other

³⁰ *Motochorro*: “*moto* from motorbike, and *chorro* meaning thief: a person who steals motorbikes.” (Globello, as cited in Riehn 2008-2009, 18)

academics' claims. It is not a closed set of words, as it has the ability to evolve and to adapt to new realities. Furthermore, he concludes that new words in *lunfardo* emerge from “the creativity of the people” (Globello, as cited in Riehn, 2008-2009, p. 19). The Argentine people are those responsible for the creation of new words that are used in our daily vocabulary.

Lastly, an interesting observation may be made in order to end our discussion regarding the topic of *lunfardo*. Such observation is the fact that Argentineans tend to replace words and verbs that exist in River Plate Spanish for terms in *lunfardo*. Why do they do this? Globello (Conde, 2009) provides two possible answers to this question. On the one hand, Globello (Conde, 2009) claims that these words are used due to the speakers' rebellious or defiant spirit. He further adds that such rebellious spirit is actually the origin of jargon-like vocabularies. However, *lunfardo* is an *argot* and not a kind of jargon, which, as it has already been explained, was a vocabulary used in the XV and XVI centuries, which also has a sort of rebellious background (2008-2009, p. 16). On the other hand, Conde (2009) explains that Argentineans use terms in *lunfardo* instead of the equivalents of those words that exist in River Plate Spanish because they feel that those terms are necessary, as they connote different things. Also, they may feel that they help them express ourselves in a better way, or they may use such terms when they have a conversation with a person that they share a close bond with. Conde (2009) also mentions the “rebellious spirit” that Globello makes reference to. Furthermore, Conde claims that we use these terms because, in some way, they identify us as Argentineans. They are part of who we are (Conde, 2009, p. 21).

To end this section, we may refer back to *cocoliche*, to explain another kind of *cocoliche* that arose with the arrival of Italians in Argentina, namely, “mock” *cocoliche*. According to Cara-Walker, this kind of *cocoliche* was a product of “non-elite” natives, that is, lower class Argentine *criollos*, who felt threatened upon the arrival of Italian immigrants as they provided cheap labor, occupied limited living space, and introduced foreign words and habits into everyday life. Thus, natives used

this kind of *cocoliche* to mock their ignorance of the *criollo*³¹ life, their foreign ways, and their failed attempts at speaking Spanish (Cara-Walker, 1987, p. 38).

Conclusion

To conclude, immigration is a phenomenon by which people choose to migrate from one country to another with the aim of building a better life. For this reason, Italians decided to migrate to Argentina halfway through the nineteenth century and towards the end of the century. However, many of them did not stay as they simply came in order to work for some time and return to Italy at some point. Our generous country received them with open arms and it provided them with everything they needed in order to progress in our country. Finally, they had a considerable impact on the Argentine society, to be precise, on the Spanish language. This was due to the development of *lunfardo*, which introduced new words into Spanish that have transcended in time and are used today as part of the usual Argentine vocabulary.

³¹ *Criollo*: “In the Argentine context, *criollo* can be applied to urban and rural groups, elite and non-elite populations, with varying connotations. Culturally, *criollo* often refers to aspects of gaucho or rural life in Argentina and to values drawn from this context representing native traditions and national culture.” (Cara-Walker, 1987, 63)

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Appendix 1



Appendix 2



Appendix 3

E-mail exchanged with Mr. Oscar Conde from the Academia Porteña del Lunfardo:

Estimado Oscar:

Soy Agustina Gazzolo de la Universidad Católica Argentina. Actualmente estoy cursando el último año de la carrera de Traductorado Público en Inglés y para una de las asignaturas tenemos que escribir un ensayo acerca de la inmigración a la Argentina. El grupo de inmigrantes que elegí son los italianos, debido a mis orígenes. Mi trabajo trata de la inmigración italiana a la Argentina durante el siglo 19,

particularmente, a partir de 1869 en adelante, es decir, después de la unificación de Italia. En el trabajo desarrollo el contexto histórico de ambos países, las razones por las cuales ellos decidieron venir, su llegada a Argentina y dedico una sección al Hotel de Inmigrantes. Por último, desarrollo una sección que trata de la influencia que tuvieron en la sociedad Argentina, por ejemplo, a través del surgimiento del cocoliche y luego del lunfardo. Con respecto a este punto tengo dos **preguntas**:

1) Entiendo que el cocoliche surgió primero debido a la forma mixta de hablar de los italianos en Argentina. ¿Esto es así? Luego, con respecto al lunfardo, ¿cómo surgió? Yo entiendo que surgió como un "dialecto" que se empezó a hablar entre los italianos (y no se si también argentinos) particularmente de clase baja.

2) Por último, entiendo que el tango tuvo una gran influencia en el lunfardo. ¿Cómo fue que lo influenció? ¿Se podría decir que el tango sirvió como un medio para "difundir" palabras lunfardas en el habla que hoy utilizamos a diario?

Desde ya muchas gracias,

Agustina Gazzolo

Respuesta 1: La gran lingüista argentina Ángela Di Tullio sostiene que el cocoliche surgió un poco antes del lunfardo. En mi opinión, son fenómenos paralelos, es decir, surgieron al mismo tiempo.

Te recomiendo que leas una conferencia que di en 2009 en la Universidad de Lomas de Zamora (te la adjunto, porque estaba en la web en el link: http://ivuwv.sisef.it/Materiali%20didattici/Forino/lunfardo_cocoliche_conferencia_abril_2009.pdf pero hoy al menos no puedo abrir el PDF). Por su parte, el cocoliche es un habla de transición desde una lengua itálica cualquiera (el toscano –que hoy es italiano estándar, pero que en tiempos de la unificación italiana (OJO CON ESTO) hablaba solo el 3 % de la población de Italia–, el genovés, el siciliano, el napolitano, el véneto, etc. etc.) al español rioplatense, considerada por los inmigrantes la lengua de prestigio que había que aprender a hablar. Todos esos intentos de tratar de hablar bien el español del Río de la Plata son formas del cocoliche. En suma: hay tantos

cocoliches como hablantes, porque el cocoliche se define no solo por la lengua materna del hablante (y digo LENGUA y no dialecto, pues las nombradas –genovés, napolitano, etc.– son verdaderas lenguas) sino también por su formación y su cultura.

Por la suya, el lunfardo es un argot o, dicho en criollo, un vocabulario popular (de ningún modo es un dialecto; un dialecto es el español rioplatense, por ejemplo, que incluye entre su léxico el lunfardo, pero también incluye muchísimas palabras que no son lunfardismos -mozo, pollera, frutilla, colectivo, etc.-, una forma de pronunciar, unos pronombres de segunda persona especiales –vos y ustedes-, etc.), un léxico formado por voces y locuciones de distintas procedencias, aunque en sus primeras décadas, entre 1870 y 1910, una buena porción de este léxico procedía de las lenguas inmigratorias, especialmente las de la península itálica.

El lunfardo surge cuando los criollos toman esos préstamos lingüísticos (bacán, mina, laburo, etc.) y los incorporan a su léxico cotidiano.

Respuesta 2: Es lo segundo, Agustina. El tango no influyó sobre el lunfardo. Tanto el sainete o género chico criollo (esto es, obras de teatro) como las letras de tango sirvieron para difundir el lunfardo a partir de 1910 más o menos. En su origen, el vocabulario lunfardo se originó en las clases populares, pero gracias a esa difusión en diarios y revistas, en el teatro, en los tangos y más tarde en la radio y el cine rápidamente ese argot fue conocido y utilizado por todos los habitantes de las grandes ciudades del Río de la Plata (Buenos Aires, Rosario, La Plata, Montevideo) y sus respectivos conurbanos.

Creo haber respondido a todo. Si tenés alguna otra duda, escribime a este mismo correo hoy o mañana.

Cordiales saludos.

o.c.

Appendix 4

Some common words in *lunfardo* used today (Berglund M., 1995):

- Afanar: to steal
- Al pelo: great, perfect
- Bardo: noise, trouble
- Bondi: bus
- Cabeza: person who does not think
- Chabón/a: a person
- Chancha: the police
- Chamullar: to flirt
- Chau: goodbye
- Che: used as vocative and an interjection
- Cheto: similar to langa, meaning someone who likes to show off, wears expensive clothes; pimp
- Chocho: happy
- Chorro: thief, robber. Also, motochorro
- Falopa: illegal drugs
- Guita, mango: money
- Laburar: work
- Lío: mess
- Mango: an Argentine peso, a monetary unit
- Mina: *mina* literally meaning mine. A woman who could be sexually exploited
- Morfar: to chow down
- Patear: to walk a lot
- Quilombo: a lot of trouble. (Que...!). What a mess!
- Re-: prefix to intensify words: “relindo” very nice
- Tachero: taxi driver
- Tano: Italian people
- Tacaño, codo, amarrete: stingy
- Tener fiaca: to be tired, lazy
- Trucho: something not legal
- Yuta: police
- Zafar de (...): to get out of a certain situation.