

Research proposal

Title

Con gli occhi del vicino: Deutschlandbilder e Italienbilder nella stampa italiana e tedesca dal 1945 al 1989

(Through The Eyes of The Neighbour: Deutschlandbilder and Italienbilder in the Italian and German Press from 1945 to 1989)

Abstract

Although the relationship between Italy and Germany has been a subject of scholarly interest across various fields, particularly in political history, the perception of each other as portrayed in the press of their respective countries remains a relatively underexplored topic, especially as regards the period after the Second World War. This research project aims at analyzing the mutual representations of Italians and Germans in the press of the two countries from 1945 to 1989. Employing a comparative approach and using corpus-based discourse analysis methods (CADS), the study seeks to uncover linguistic strategies and recurring *topoi* and motifs in the reciprocal representations, thereby illuminating the evolution of national images and its impact on German-Italian relations.

Introduction and theoretical framework

The topic of the mutual relations between Germany and Italy has attracted significant attention in various historiographical fields, especially in political history, with many research initiatives and proposals emerging over the past decades. The Italian philosopher and Germanist Angelo Bolaffi emphasizes the ‘inflationary’ nature of this theme and the complexity of the Italo-German relationship, characterized by a constant oscillation between attraction and suspicion, admiration and misunderstanding, closeness and distance (Bolaffi 2001). Despite maintaining strong economic, political, and cultural ties, the two countries remain substantially “distant neighbors” (*Ferne Nachbarn*), as coined by the German historian Christof Dipper, knowing little about each other despite their perceived familiarity (Dipper 2017). This mutual estrangement, which historian Gian Enrico Rusconi and colleagues defined as “*schleichende Entfremdung*” (Rusconi et al. 2008) has been exacerbated by the global financial crisis of 2008, leading to fears of German hegemony on a continental scale, particularly in Italy, and fostering what historian Gabriele D’Ottavio defines as “anti-German euroscepticism” (D’Ottavio 2014). On the other side, Italy has faced harsh criticism from the German political elite for its chronic inability to implement necessary structural reforms, both politically and economically. Interestingly, while official rhetoric often emphasizes the ‘excellent relations’ between the two countries, a different narrative emerges in the media. The journalistic discourse serves as a significant vehicle for negative stereotypes, clichés, and recurring *topoi*, playing a crucial role in disseminating and perpetuating negative images of the Other.

In light of these observations, my research project seeks to analyze the evolution of mutual perceptions between Italians and Germans as depicted in the press of their respective countries (from 1945 to 1989), a topic which has been only marginally investigated. By analyzing linguistic patterns and recurring motifs and stereotypes associated with national images, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of mutual perceptions and their impact on bilateral relations during the specified period.

The theoretical framework of the study is rooted in imagology, the study of the origin and function of images of other countries and peoples as expressed in textual works, including literature, theater, poetry, travel accounts, and essays (Beller&Leerssen 2007). This discipline has evolved from merely describing national characteristics (*Völkerpsychologie*) to viewing the nation as a cultural construction or artifact (in line with a constructivist approach) and is now understood as the critical study of national characterization. Additionally, it has expanded beyond literature to include other types of texts, including media and the press.

State of research

Examining the current secondary literature reveals that the German side has generally given more prominence to the topic, resulting in a greater quantity of studies on *Deutschlandbilder* than on *Italienbilder*. As Germanist Klaus Heitmann points out, this difference in interest is justifiable primarily because the tradition of imagological studies is much more deeply rooted in Germany than in Italy. Another reason that could explain the greater interest of Germans in how other countries perceive Germany is the experience of Nazism and World War II: "this enormous burden in collective memory" would have generated a sort of 'obsession' with the reception of one's own image among neighboring European countries (Heitmann 2003).

While there are numerous studies on respective national images in historiography and literature (see: *Attachment*, p. 6-7), there is a significant research gap on the evolution of mutual representations of Italians and Germans in the press, especially as regards the period after the Second World War. With the exception of an interesting study by Kuntz (1997), which comprehensively examined the portrayal of Germany in major Italian newspapers from 1945 to 1990, offering the most extensive imagological analysis in press studies, the existing literature on the post-World War II era comprises fragmented analyses. These studies primarily concentrate on specific newspapers and narrow time frames, frequently spanning only single months or years. Similar to Kuntz's study, these contributions concentrate solely on individual viewpoints, examining either the 'German perspective' on Italy or the 'Italian perspective' on Germany, without embracing the comparative approach outlined in my project. The sole study that examines mutual perceptions from a comparative standpoint is the "SICIT-project" (*Stato dell'informazione e della comunicazione italo-tedesca*) initiated by the Italian Institute of German Studies in 2021 and still ongoing. Although it primarily addresses contemporary dynamics, this project serves as a significant methodological reference for the present research.

Methodology

The advent of digitization has sparked increasing interest in empirical and quantitative analyses of authentic linguistic data, particularly within linguistics fields oriented towards social and cultural studies. The methodological design of this research project is based on the approach of *Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies* (CADS), which combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches, integrating techniques from Corpus Linguistics and Discourse Analysis (Baker et al. 2008). The primary objective of CADS is to uncover linguistic patterns within discourses, revealing "non-obvious meaning" that may not be immediately apparent through traditional methods (Partington et al. 2013).

While some researchers have applied corpus methodologies in discourse analysis, this field remains relatively under-explored and faces resistance and criticisms due to various reasons, such as social scientists' general "unfamiliarity" with computers and the widespread perception that corpus-based approaches tend to abstract text from context. However, despite these criticisms, CADS offers numerous advantages. Firstly, it enables researchers to manage vast amounts of data that are not easily analyzable through manual methods. Moreover, it helps reduce researcher bias by providing a systematic approach to data analysis and facilitating self-reflection and validation of initial hypotheses. Furthermore, CADS can reveal the incremental effect of discourse by uncovering how language is employed to construct underlying discourses. Lastly, its use of multiple methods of analysis (triangulation) helps enhance the validity of findings, allowing researchers to cross-validate hypotheses, anchor findings in robust interpretations, and respond flexibly to unforeseen challenges in their research (Baker 2006).

As regards my project there are some important key questions I would like to focus on:

1. How can computational linguistic tools be utilized to analyze journalistic discourse, particularly in identifying recurring *topoi* and stereotypes in the reciprocal representations of Italians and Germans?
2. How can these representations be recognized in the corpus, considering their often implicit nature?
3. In which circumstances (political, historical, cultural, etc.) do specific representations occur and how do they impact the mutual relations between the two countries?

These will guide the entire research, which will proceed in different phases.

The first step in conducting a CADS analysis involves constructing a corpus, a labor-intensive process, especially for a diachronic corpus. For this research, two national newspapers with the highest circulation in each country were selected: *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa* for Italy, and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* for Germany. Additionally, two weekly magazines, *Der Spiegel* and *L'Espresso*, were included in the analysis. Articles from each publication were selected based on specific keywords present in the title, related to the discourse on national images (e.g. words like "Germania" and "Italien", lemmas like "tedesc*")

or “italien*”). The collected articles were divided into two macro-corpora: one for the German press and one for the Italian press, each further subdivided into five sub-corpora corresponding to the selected time periods (1945-1949, 1950-1959, 1960-1969, 1970-1979, and 1980-1989). It is important to stress that building a diachronic corpus poses several challenges, primarily related to the availability and accessibility of sources, especially for older materials that may not be digitized. This is not the case for the majority of the above-mentioned selected newspapers, which offer digital archives accessible online. Unfortunately not all sources are readily available in digital format (for instance, accessing *L'Espresso* requires me to visit the archive of the Fondazione Pietro Nenni in Rome, in order to consult the paper versions) and imply manual extraction and digitization. Additionally, even when digital versions are available, they may have poor optical character recognition (OCR) texts, necessitating manual transcription or adjustment of the existing texts. These factors significantly increase the labor intensity of corpus construction, adding time and effort to the process (Del Fante et al. 2021).

Once the articles have been collected, annotated, and prepared, the gathered corpora will undergo linguistic analysis through specialized software such as *SketchEngine* or *WordSmith* and specific techniques that are available for corpus-based discourse analysis. As noted by Italian linguist Paolo Orrù, these techniques generally involve generating a word frequency list and a list of keywords. After analyzing and categorizing the keywords by semantic area, researchers usually read the concordance lines, which are text strings obtained from searching for a linguistic form, focusing on entries that appear most interesting for investigation. Subsequently, based on these initial surveys, other techniques can be applied too, such as collocation analysis, linguistic clusters (“n-grams”) or dispersion plot analysis, which shows the concentration of certain words in specific parts of the corpus (Orrù 2022).

The findings from the linguistic analysis will guide the qualitative phase of the research, where discourse analysis will be conducted to explore representations of national images in the press. Special attention will be given to the emergence of recurring *topoi* and stereotypes in the representations of Italians and Germans. Since these representations can often be implicit (Wengeler 2013), a fully automated detection in the corpus may not be possible, necessitating manual detection methods as well.

Selected bibliography

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Attachment (tables, graphs or pictures)

Table 1: Main studies on the mutual images of Italians and Germans in various fields of research.

Political-Historical Studies		
Deutschlandbild	Italienbild	From a mutual perspective
<p>M. BRÜCK, <i>Deutschland und Italien. Korrektur eines verzerrten Deutschlandbildes</i>, in <i>Deutschlands Außenpolitik seit 1955</i>, edited by H. Reuther, Stuttgart, Seewald Verlag, 1965, pp.154-168</p> <p>J. PETERSEN, <i>La resistenza tedesca vista dall'Italia: il giudizio dei contemporanei e degli storici</i>, in <i>La resistenza tedesca 1933-1945</i>, edited by C. Natoli, Milano, 1989, pp.254-265</p> <p>L.V. FERRARIS, <i>Die häßlichen Deutschen, in Die häßlichen Deutschen? Deutschland im Spiegel der östlichen und westlichen Nachbarn</i>, edited by G. Trautmann, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991, pp.244-250</p> <p>G.E. RUSCONI, <i>Die deutsche Einigung aus italienischer Sicht: Historische Prämissen und aktuelle Entwicklungen</i>, in <i>Deutsche und italienische Europapolitik - historische Grundlagen und aktuelle Fragen</i>, edited by S. Wilking, Bonn, Europa Union Verlag, 1992, pp.23-37</p> <p>J. PETERSEN, <i>L'unificazione tedesca del 1989-1990 vista dall'Italia</i>, in «Storia Contemporanea», XXIII/6 (1992), pp.1087-1124</p> <p>L. CARACCILO, <i>La Germania vista dall'Italia</i>, in <i>La Germania vista dagli altri</i>, edited by M. Korinman, Milano, Guerini e Associati, pp.51-62</p> <p>G. CORNI, <i>La Germania vista dall'Italia. Dall'età liberale al crollo del fascismo</i>, in <i>Studi in onore di Giovanni Miccoli</i>, edited by L. Ferrari, Trieste, Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2004, pp.399-416</p> <p>G. CORNI, C. DIPPER, <i>Italiani in Germania tra Ottocento e Novecento: spostamenti, rapporti, immagini, influenze</i>, edited by G. Corni e C. Dipper, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2006</p>	<p>J. PETERSEN, <i>Das deutsche politische Italienbild in der Zeit der nationalen Einigung</i>, in <i>Deutsche Italienbilder und italienische Deutschlandbilder in der Zeit der nationalen Bewegungen (1830-1870)</i>, edited by A. Ara e R. Lill, Bologna, Jahrbuch des deutsch-italienischen Institutes in Trient, 1991, pp.169-204</p> <p>J. PETERSEN, <i>Das deutschsprachige Italienbild nach 1945</i>, in «Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken», Vol.76 (1996), pp.455-495</p> <p>G. D'OTTAVIO, <i>Under Special Surveillance: Italy through German Eyes, 1975-1976</i>, in «Journal of Modern Italian Studies», 20/3 (2015), pp.330-345</p> <p>C. DIPPER, <i>Ferne Nachbarn: Vergleichende Studien zu Deutschland und Italien in der Moderne</i>, Wien - Köln - Weimar, Böhlau Verlag, 2017</p>	<p>J. PETERSEN, <i>Italia e Germania: due immagini incrociate</i>, in <i>L'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale e nella resistenza</i>, edited by F. Ferrarini Tosi, G. Grassi, M. Legnani, Milano, Franco Angeli Libri, 1988, pp.45-63</p> <p>A. ARA, R. LILL, <i>Deutsche Italienbilder und italienische Deutschlandbilder in der Zeit der nationalen Bewegungen (1830-1870)</i>, Bologna, Jahrbuch des deutsch-italienischen historischen Institutes in Trient, 1991</p> <p>J. PETERSEN, <i>Italianizzazione della Germania? Germanizzazione dell'Italia? L'immagine dell'altro nella reciproca percezione di sé</i>, in <i>Italia e Germania 1945-2000. La costruzione dell'Europa</i>, edited by G.E. Rusconi e H. Woller, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2005, pp.43-57</p> <p>G. D'OTTAVIO, <i>Germany and Italy: The 'odd couple' at the Heart of Europe</i>, in «Contemporary Italian Politics», 10 (2018), pp.14-35</p>
Literature		
Deutschlandbild	Italienbild	From a mutual perspective
<p>P. AMELUNG, <i>Das Bild des Deutschen in der Literatur der italienischen Renaissance (1400-1559)</i>, München, Max Hueber Verlag, 1964</p> <p>H.G. GRÜNING, <i>Zum Deutschlandbild in Italien und in der italienischen Literatur im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert</i>, in: «Konfigurationen», 6 (2002), pp.65-93</p> <p>K. HEITMANN, <i>Das italienische Deutschlandbild in seiner Geschichte / Band I: Von den Anfängen bis 1800</i>, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003</p>	<p>I.M. BATTAFARANO, <i>L'Italia ir-reale. Descritta dai tedeschi negli ultimi cinque secoli e raccontata agli italiani dal loro punto di vista</i>, Taranto, Scorpione Editrice, 1997</p> <p>K. BERGDOLT, <i>Kriminell, korrupt, katholisch? Italiener im deutschen Vorurteil</i>, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2018</p>	<p>H. RÜDIGER, <i>Literarisches Klischee und lebendige Erfahrung: Über das Bild des Deutschen in der italienischen Literatur und des Italiens in der deutschen Literatur</i>, Düsseldorf, Dt. Fraternitas, 1967</p> <p>M. BELLER, <i>Geschichtserfahrung und Selbstbespiegelung im Deutschlandbild der italienischen und im Italienbild der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur</i>, in «Arcadia. Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft», 17 (1982), pp.154-170</p>

<p>K. HEITMANN, <i>Das italienische Deutschlandbild in seiner Geschichte / Band II: Das lange neunzehnte Jahrhundert (1800–1915)</i>, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 2008</p> <p>K. HEITMANN, <i>Das italienische Deutschlandbild in seiner Geschichte / Band III: Das kurze zwanzigste Jahrhundert (1914–1989)</i>, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012</p>		
Media Studies (focus: press)		
<i>Deutschlandbild</i>	<i>Italienbild</i>	<i>From a mutual perspective</i>
<p>S. BOLOGNA, H. LINTZE, <i>Die Deutsche Frage im Spiegel der italienischen Presse</i>, in «Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts», 4/90 (1990), pp.100-105</p> <p>E.S. KUNTZ, <i>Konstanz und Wandel von Stereotypen: Deutschlandbilder in der italienischen Presse nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg</i>, Frankfurt a.M., Peter Lang Verlag, 1997</p>	<p>R. RAGUSA, <i>Der Medien-Stiefel. Italienische Berichterstattung in der deutschen Presse</i>, Frankfurt a.M., Peter Lang Verlag, 1981</p> <p>I.M. BATTAFARANO, <i>Pregiudizi e intuizioni italo-tedesche: trent'anni di vita italiana nella stampa tedesca (1976-2006)</i>, Sassari, EDES, 2007</p> <p>S. WILKING, <i>Das Italienbild in der Bundesdeutschen Presse der 70er und 80er Jahre</i>, in <i>Deutsche und italienische Europapolitik: historische Grundlagen und aktuelle Fragen</i>, edited by S. Wilking, Bonn, Europa Union Verlag, 1992, p.64</p> <p>W. PÜTZ, <i>Das Italienbild in der deutschen Presse. Eine Untersuchung ausgewählter Tageszeitungen</i>, München, Ölschläger Verlag, 1993</p> <p>R. U. KUNZE, <i>Se non è vero, è molto ben trovato. Aspekte der Italienberichterstattung in SPIEGEL und ZEIT</i>, in «Journal of New Frontiers in Spatial Concepts», vol.1 (2009), pp.1-7</p>	<p>Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici (IISG), <i>Osservatorio SICIT: Stato dell'informazione e della comunicazione italo-tedesca</i> (2021 - ongoing)</p>