

# RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

## Tracing language heritage in Italian-Australians

Dr Catherine Best from the MARCS Institute, Dr Bruno Di Biase from FILEF, Dr Mario Vayra from the University of Bologna and Dr Cinzia Avesani from ISTC-CNR have been awarded funding through the UWS Partnerships program to investigate the continuity of regional Italian accents and dialects in Italian-Australian immigrants. This project will map accent and dialect traces in individuals, and measure the perception of them by Italians living in those regions. Honours, PhD and Masters students from UWS and the University of Bologna will assist.

'Research into the Italian-Australian community and their linguistic heritage will enrich Australia's modern, multicultural institutions', Dr Best explains. 'The insights into how accents and dialects change over time will inform current understandings, and even predict future language use.' This community has a lengthy history here, making up the fourth largest ethnic group in Australia and possessing a uniquely Italian-Australian dialect – *Italo-Australian* – consisting of combined Italian and English words. This makes them an ideal population for linguistic research.

Italian-Australian immigrants, both first and second generation, from two distinct areas of Italy will be recruited. Their unique speech patterns will be analysed by linguists from Italy. An additional group of non-linguists native to those Italian regions will listen to the Italian-Australians' speech and identify components from their own dialects, as well as differences. All this information will be used to create a linguistic archaeological map – tracing the original sounds to their Italian-Australian incarnations. The work will be conducted at the MARCS Institute, Sydney, the University of Bologna, and the Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies, Italy.



If the mechanisms that maintain or change regional accents and dialects over time can be understood, they could be used to aid people learning a second language, or those with speech impediments.

**Project Title:** Tracing regional Italian roots in the speech of Italian-Australians  
**Funding has been set at:** \$41,087  
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**July 2015**

Supported by: Federation of Italian Migrant Workers and their Families (FILEF)  
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Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies,  
**National Research Council, Italy (ISTC-CNR)**