

## **A Brief Introduction to Piemontèis**

*The following article includes some words with phonetic transcriptions. In order to adhere to a standardized system of representing sounds, the symbols used are those of the IPA, or International Phonetic Alphabet. Those who are unfamiliar with these symbols are urged to Google “International Phonetic Alphabet”, where several websites describe these symbols in detail and even furnish sound files for further clarification.*

### ***Definition***

Piemontèis, or “Piedmontese” in English, is a Romance language native to, and spoken primarily in the Italian region of Piemonte, or *Piemont*. Recent informal estimates put the number of speakers there at about 2 million. It is also spoken in neighboring Val d’Aosta as well as in various places around the world where Piedmontese natives settled in significant numbers, including France, Australia, and South America—the largest concentration being in Argentina. Interesting from a historical perspective are several small towns in Sicily which preserve dialects of Piemontèis origin, linguistic relicts of medieval colonization from the north.

### ***Linguistic situation within Piemonte***

Within Piemonte varieties of Piemontèis are spoken in an area significantly smaller than that delineated by the regional boundary. In several directions the transition from Piemontèis to another language is gradual, with no one or even few definitive features to set it apart from its neighbors; rather, there are a group of phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical characteristics that, if present in certain percentages, make a local dialect intelligible as a variety of Piemontèis. Towards the east through the *pianura*, the speech of Novara is already closer in some respects to Lombard; moving southeast or south the influence of Ligurian makes itself heard well before the regional border: at Novi Ligure the speech is primarily Ligurian rather than Piemontèis; towards the southwest the situation becomes more complex as a few traits of distinctly

Occitan type sometimes mix with Piedmontese and Ligurian ones (particularly in the area called “Kyé”) creating some very distinctive local dialects; towards the extreme southwest and west we are now within the arc of the Alps and the division is sharper, where Piemontèis traditionally did not penetrate into the mountains, and local speech classified as Occitan, rather close to the Provençal Alpin spoken on the French side, is heard from the heads of the mountain valleys up into the Alps. Inhabitants of these valleys along the western edge of Piemonte (*Les Valades Ousitanes*) have maintained local versions of what they typically call “*lou patouà*”, those closer to the valley heads and the *pianura* often sharing many lexical, morphological, and grammatical characteristics with Piemontèis, while those further in differing more strongly. In several valleys of Turin Province where the Waldensian Church is predominant, French has traditionally been used for the liturgy, and until very recently most inhabitants there were quadrilingual (Italian, Piemontèis, Ousitan, French). A certain linguistic transition occurs west of Turin in the Val Susa. Here, in this westernmost of valleys, heavy cultural and political influence from France can be detected in the Occitan speech of communities such as Oulx, although the city of Susa itself has for some time used Piemontèis due to its historic importance to the Savòja family. Meanwhile, Franco-Provençal speech, varieties of which are also spoken in the *département* of Savoie as well as Canton Valais, is already present at Coazze in Val Sangone, a scant 20 miles from Turin. From this general area on north into Val d’Aosta, forms of Franco-Provençal are used in the Alpine valleys alongside French and, in the larger towns, Piemontèis. To their east, Piemontèis dialects such as *canavzan* and *bielèis* are spoken until the regional boundary veers northeast along the perimeter of the province of Verbania-Ossola-Cusio where one encounters a morphologically archaic form of Piemontèis type in the Val Sesia, next to communities of Germanic speech (Walser, akin to Swiss German dialects) around the vicinity of Monte Rosa. In the northernmost part of Piemonte the dominant regional speech is again, as with the easternmost area, of a predominantly Lombard type, akin to the speech of adjacent Canton Ticino.

Mention should also be made of the presence of Sinti and Rom, languages of exotic origin long established in the region.

The Piemontèis-speaking area in the stricter sense can be divided into two general types: western, or “high” Piemontèis, and eastern, or “low” Piemontèis, the terms “high” and “low” referring to relative geographical elevations. The two categories are in turn made up of numerous local dialects whose morphology and vocabulary can have significant differences. These dialects are typically named by geographical area or principal city, such as “*turinèis*”, “*éd Coni*,” “*astesan*”, “*langaireul*”, “*monfrin*”, “*vërslèis*”, “*lissandrin*”, “*canavzan*”, etc. In general, it can be said that while marked differences in local pronunciation and morphology do exist, there remains a certain degree of uniformity in lexicon, and there is usually basic intelligibility between two dialects, no doubt reflecting the many centuries of shared cultural experiences within the political state of Savoy.

While Piemonte possesses a rich mixture of indigenous languages, broadly classifiable as Occitan, Franco-Provençal, Walser, and Piemontèis, it was Piemontèis in its common regional form, prior to the imposition of Italian, which was the dominant language of the region with by far the greatest number of speakers. In fact, all the speakers of the minority languages have traditionally been fluent in and made use of Piemontèis, particularly when communicating outside their immediate localities.

### ***Historical Usage***

French had long been the sole official language of the Duchy of Savoy, even though Piemontèis was the primary indigenous tongue of the region. Therefore most inhabitants lived in a state of diglossia, at least competent enough in French to carry out business where Piemontèis was not allowed. When the opportunistic Savòja family transferred their capital from Chambéry to Turin in 1563, allowing closer ties with peninsular Italy, they lost no time in adopting Tuscan as a co-official language. Despite the non-official status of Piemontèis, the dominance of Turin as capital and largest city in Savoy gave prestige to the variety spoken there,

so while people continued to use local Piemontèis dialects within their communities, all social classes (including the nobility at Court) adopted Turinèis as an everyday regional standard to communicate with their countrymen throughout the Duchy—an unusual situation for a language which had no formal recognition. It's now difficult to imagine the primary role that Piemontèis played at every level of Savoyard society during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is in great part because it was never officially acknowledged despite its ubiquity and prestige, and thus rarely received mention in official histories, and rarer still was it preserved in official records, these being almost invariably in French, and later in Tuscan as well.

From the few contemporary mentions of the language we can at least get some idea of its former prominence. Professor Gianrenzo Clivio notes one such reference provided by Maurizio Pipino, who gave us the earliest Piemontèis dictionary and grammar. In the grammar's dedication to the princess Marie Adelaide Clotilde Saveria of France we are told that she had wanted to learn Piemontèis "from her princes, and she deigned yet to speak it." As Professor Clivio says, "[This is] an obvious indication that it was the language used at Court." Another anecdote noted by Professor Clivio, quoting Francesco Cognasso, relates that in 1788 while preparations were being made for the wedding of Duke of Aosta Vittorio Emanuele, "the abbot Draghetti was dispatched to Milan in order to teach the bride, Maria Teresa, the Piedmontese language, and a few months later the marquis Cacciapiatti gave affirmation to that effect: he had offered New Year's salutations in Piemontèis and the princess had replied, "dans cette langue avez beaucoup de facilité et de grace": one could be sure that in Turin she would have understood and spoken the language well."

With the development of Piedmontese literature, it was usually Turinèis which provided the vehicle for expression. Thus Turinèis became and remained synonymous with standard Piemontèis until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But by that time, years of oppressive laws had taken their toll on the language. The political decline of Turin, and Piemonte in general, combined with the assault of fascism followed by an openly hostile post-war Rome and massive foreign immigration from economically depressed Southern Italy resulted in

a language increasingly eroded by Italian. Even before this point Piedmontese writers and literary people had realized that Turinèis was no longer able to maintain its role of authentic vehicle of Piedmontese expression. A worthy standard, literary language would have to recoup its former expressive power by readmitting many of the old words and grammatical forms no longer used in Turin itself but still alive in the smaller provincial towns and the countryside, especially in the western areas.

In spite of the rapid demographic and social change commencing in the 1950's, Piemontèis continued to show great tenacity, adapting to and even contributing to the remarkable industrial growth that took hold in the region throughout the post-WWII period: traditionally a language of the workplace as well as the home, it was the idiom of choice for many technicians, scientists, and executives—as foreign investors in FIAT were to discover only at the beginning of the 3rd millennium, when to their consternation they couldn't comprehend what was said in the executive boardroom.

Worthy of a separate study is the specialized Piemontèis technical jargon that evolved in the factories and production lines of such companies. Even when workers were sent abroad they often exported their language, as happened at the Togliatti Factory in the former Soviet Union.

The net effect of two great waves of foreign immigration into Piemonte in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the first from Southern Italy during the 60's and 70's, followed by a somewhat smaller one from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe in the 1990's, has undoubtedly been to further marginalize Piemontèis, most strongly in urban areas. It would be wrong, however, to think that there is a proportional correlation between such immigration and the disuse of Piemontèis. To be sure, just as it does today, the State in ca. 1970 discouraged the newly-arrived Calabrese from assimilating in any way to the culture of Turin or of other Piedmontese towns. Yet frequently the immigrant, or his children, perhaps facing occasional suspicion or resentment, would little by little adopt the manners and customs of the new home, sometimes to a degree exceeding even that of children of old Piedmontese

families. Just a few decades later, the family of Southern origin might speak Piemontèis far better than many indigenous inhabitants. Repeat this scenario for the Senegalese or Albanian immigrant of the 1990's, and it becomes clear that an increasingly heterogeneous society cannot solely account for the rapid shrinkage of the language's speaking base.

### ***Status***

Piemontèis enjoys no official recognition in its native country; in fact, the Italian State has declared it (as well as the whole of Piemontèis culture) to be “non-existent” as a distinct, separate entity, and “[no more than] a by-product of Italian culture”. This declaration is in accordance with long-standing government policies, first instituted under Benito Mussolini, which aim to stamp out indigenous culture in many (principally northern) regions of Italy.

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the appearance of the Internet and “globalization”. These two developments have profoundly impacted Piemontèis. The first pushed it beyond the immediate grasp of Rome and has allowed it a world-wide audience with the dissemination of much literature that would be otherwise impossible in hard copy. Globalization has meant that Italian, as a relatively minor language within the European Union, now faces being dominated by an outside language (primarily English). Membership within the Union has brought new laws regarding the respect accorded linguistic minorities and potentially widespread changes in the political pecking-order. The realization that even national languages are no longer safe from the outside has caused a re-evaluation of cultural patrimony in many EU countries.

Certain changes in the status of Italy's regions at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century created for the first time the opportunity for Piemontèis to be taught at a school or other public facility, but only as an elective, privately-funded subject taught within a restricted time period after normal school hours and apart from the state school curriculum. Further efforts were made to place Piemontèis on the regional list of protected languages, particularly by former

singer Gipo Farassin. Formal recognition of the language was finally included in the Region's charter, but predictably, resulting funding for its preservation, or even its allowance in public—which should have automatically followed—did not occur as the Italian state had no intention of actually honoring the regional law.

### ***Classification***

Piemontèis is a member of the Romance group within the Italic Branch of the Indo-European family, closely affiliated to Italian, Rheto-Romance, French, and Occitan languages.

Showing the exact familial relationships that Piemontèis has with its neighboring Romance languages has been problematic. The same may be said of those regional language groups to which it is probably most closely related—Lombard, Ligurian, Emilian, and Romagnol. These languages, which are often collectively referred to as “Gallo-Italian”, seem to have evolved from early Gallo-Romance (which was also the source of French, Occitan, and Rheto-Romance) and so show a fundamental kinship with Western Romance languages but not with the languages of Central and Southern Italy, (e.g. Italian) or Rumanian. On the other hand, certain later phonetic and morphological traits do exhibit strong ties to the Italian Peninsula. Of these so-called Gallo-Italian languages and dialects, Piemontèis often exhibits the greatest lexical differences from Italian and, perhaps not surprisingly, given its location, strong similarities to Occitan, Franco-Provençal, and French.

### ***Phonology***

Piemontèis has 20 consonant sounds, including 2 semi consonants, and 9 vowel sounds, which arose from the sounds of the late Latin spoken in former Cisalpine Gaul. The original Latin system of long and short vowels, in changing to one of stress accent, developed several new sounds, with marked contrast between open and closed vowels. Characteristic of Piemontèis (and Gallo-Italian in general), as well as Gallo-Romance and Rheto-Romance are the presence of the mid-rounded vowels [y] and [ø] (e.g., Lat. *crudus*, *lōcus* > Fr. *cru*

[kʁy], *lieu* [ljø], Piem. *cru* [kʁy], *leu* [lø]. The increasing simplification of words also created new consonant sounds previously alien to Latin in several varieties of early Romance, typical examples being a series of palatalized plosive consonants and nasalization.

During its development from late Latin, Piemontèis consonants underwent four major processes of *lenition*, *assibilation*, *palatalization*, and *velarization*. Lenition, a process affecting all of the speech of Northern Italy to varying degrees, was here particularly pronounced in several phonetic environments. Double consonants were simplified to single ones, intervocalic voiceless consonants became voiced or, along with intervocalic voiced consonants, often disappeared entirely. Early documents show that these changes were fairly consistent and rather to the same degree and under similar conditions that Old French was affected, but later influence, first from the Latinized vocabulary of the Church, and then to an extensive degree from Southern Italian (mainly Tuscan) obliterated much of this early development.

Assibilation, which had already begun in Central Italy during Roman Imperial times and affected all the languages within modern Italy excepting Sardegna, was the process by which Latin velar consonants c, g, were palatalized before vowels i and e (e.g., *centum*, *gelāre* ['kɛntum, gɛlaare] > Ital. *cento*, *gelare* ['tʃɛnto, dʒɛ'lare], Piem. *sent*, *zlé* [sɛnt, zle], Fr. *cent*, *geler* [sɑ̃, ʒɛle]). This process, originally very strong in Piemontèis, has been greatly obscured through recent influence from Italian (e.g., authentic *zlé*, *fassa* have tended to yield to the forms *gelé*, *facia*, respectively); in fact, even today there are many alternative forms substituting an Italianized sound for the genuine one (e.g., Italianized *social* [su'tʃal] instead of *sossial* [su'sjɔl]).

Palatalization of l after an initial consonant occurred over a wide area of Italy but did not spread beyond the Alps (e.g., *clamare*, *glaceum*, *flore*, *platea*, *blancus* > It. *chiamare*, *ghiaccio*, *fiore*, *piazza*, *bianco* vs. Fr. *claimer*, *glace*, *fleur*, *place*, *blanc*). In the Alpine and Cisalpine areas this phenomenon either never occurred (cf. in Occitan of Turin Province, Francoprovençal, Alpine Lombard, Ladin, Furlan) or did so at a later date, as happened in Piemonte where,

however, in the case of *c* or *g* it surpassed the simple passage of *l* > *j* characteristic of Italian by palatalizing the initial consonants as well (Piem. *ciamé, giassa, fior, piassa, bianch*). Palatalization within a word affected western Piemontèis and French in similar ways: Lat. *auriclum, oculum* > Fr. *oreille, oeil* [*o<sup>1</sup>ʁej, œj*] and Piem. *orija, euj* [*o<sup>1</sup>ʁij e, øj*].

Velarization, the last phenomenon, spread from Gaul into Piemonte and Liguria but generally did not reach areas east of there (however it also occurs in more distant areas such as the eastern Alps and even Sicily). *L* was again affected, this time by being vocalized *before* a consonant (presumably after passing through a stage when it was velarized, as in English “dark” *l*). In French and Occitan *l* was typically vocalized in all such environments, while in Piemontèis it was only regularly vocalized before dentals and sibilants (e.g., Fr. *coup, haut, faux*, vs. Piem. *colp, àut, fàuss*). Related to this is a secondary phenomenon called rhotacism. Before certain other consonants Latin *l* would not vocalize, but would become an *r*. In some instances, even French shows this same development: Lat. *ulmus* > Fr. *orme*, Piem. *orm*.

### ***Morphology***

Hand-in-hand with phonetic changes to early Romance came morphological changes. In the case of Piemontèis, extensive and often radical simplification affected word forms, while stress accent was generally much more conservative. This tendency in Romance—with the notable exception of Italian—for easier pronunciation created an aversion to difficult stress accents, especially proparoxytones. An extreme result of this can be seen in French, where paroxytone and proparoxytone accents regularly shifted to the last syllable (excluding one with final *-e*) before disappearing entirely from the individual word in the modern period. Piemontèis usually kept the accent that had been inherited from Latin, but eliminated most proparoxytones through truncation of final unaccented syllables or through weakening and elimination of intervening consonants. This process, however, has been partially obscured by mixture with Italian (e.g., Lat. *lācrima* > Piem. *lerma* [*l<sup>1</sup>εRMε*], now often substituted by Italian *lagrima* [*l<sup>1</sup>agrima*]).

Characteristic of the Piemontèis word is the loss of the final vowels of Latin except for the feminine singular *-a*, which has its plural in *-e* (e.g., Lat. *fēmina*, *fēminae*, Piem. *fomna*, *fomne*, but Lat. *amīcus*, *amīci*, Piem. *amis*, *amis*). Words ending in *-l*, however, show a plural in *-j* from earlier *l* (e.g., *caval*, pl. *cavaj*). A distinctive feature is conservation of final *-s* in certain short words, mostly verbs (Lat. *sex*, *facis* > Piem. *ses*, [*it*] *fas*), or locally, even as a regular verb ending (Lat. *cantās* > Piem. of Cuneo: [*it*] *càntes*).

Among other distinguishing characteristics is the development of Latin *-ct* in words such as *lactem*, *noctem*, *factus*, giving on the one hand Fr. *lait*, *nuit*, *fait*, and (standard) Piem. *làit*, *neuit*, *fàit*, while on the other hand giving Occitan *lach*, *nuech*, *fach*, and Lombard (& eastern Piemontèis) *lacc*, *neucc*, *facc* (*-cc* = [*tʃ*]). A very different solution is found in Italian, where the *c* was assimilated to the *t*, producing geminate consonants: *latte*, *notte*, *fatto*.

Another distinctive trait is frequent vowel sandhi or alteration within words as an aid to greater euphony in a phrase or sentence. The word *mlon*, for example, beginning as it does with a “difficult” consonant pair, acquires a prosthetic *ë* [ə] when immediately following another consonant; hence, *sinch ëmlon* [*sɪnk əmˈlũN*], “five melons”, which avoids the awkward cluster [*Nkml*]. Likewise we have *stèila*, “star”, but *set ëstèile*, “seven stars”. Conversely, a word immediately following a vowel may “borrow” it, shifting vocalization to the head of the word and eliding an internal vowel; thus *nessessari* is altered in the following: *lòn a l’è pa ansessari* [*lõN v le ˈpɔnsɛˈsɔri*], “that’s not necessary”. Such alterations as these that a speaker or writer makes are based more on aural judgment and experience than on hard and fast rules.

### **Lexicon**

Piemonte has for millennia been a region bounded by major cultural and political borders. The intrusion and settlement of various peoples, among them Ligurians, Gauls, Romans, and Lombards, to name a few, commenced long before there were written records. We can’t identify all of them with certainty, but they have in many

instances left us with tantalizing glimpses, both in their material artifacts, and by intangibles such as the traces they left in local vocabulary.

Among the words which date from the prehistoric period are *barma*, a rock shelter or cave, which is also found in Basque; *dòira*, found as the name of several local rivers, e.g., *Dòira Bàutia*, as well as having cognates in the Iberian Peninsula (*Douro*); and *bàita*, a mountain cabin or hut, seemingly a borrowing from a Semitic language (cf. بيت). A great number of words derive from Celtic, perhaps the earliest pre-Roman source about which we can be certain. Among the many terms which survive are *crin*, or pig; *braje*, pants, breeches; *broa*, margin or border; *bòja*, bug, insect; *dru*, fertile, fecund; *brich*, a steep hill or mountain, and *comba*, valley. Latin continued to supply words long after the Roman period. The Church introduced “learned” Latin religious terms which in some cases replaced their own vernacular descendents: *vita* replaced *via*, life, and *ànima* replaced *arma*, soul. Within this religious vocabulary are numerous words of Greek or Hebrew origin: *saba*, Saturday, *messia*, messiah, *Pasca*, Easter, and *gesia*, church. The core of the vocabulary, while of Latin derivation and shared with other Romance languages to a greater or lesser extent, nevertheless exhibits distinctly regional characteristics due to the adoption of originally local slang terms or loan-words into Proto-Romance dialects during the middle of the first millennium. Thus in the world of nature we have *lapin*, rabbit, *caval*, horse, *parpajon*, butterfly, *sapin*, spruce, *lòsna*, lightning. This was soon supplemented with numerous words pertaining to everyday life from languages of later settlers such as Gothic and Langobard. Among these are *masca*, witch, *vàud*, woad, and *ghèddo*, style, grace, as well as *scarpa*, shoe, and *stua*, stove, these last two words becoming widely distributed in Italy. From such varied sources the inhabitants of Piemonte further enriched their vocabulary with a large number of coinages, for example, *pleuja*, rind, from a cross between *greuja*, shell (of a vegetable or egg), and *plaja*, bark; *scantiré*, stretch, from *tiré*, pull, and *cant*, side; *dēsprende*, to “unlearn”; and *dēs marié*, to “unmarry” (alongside *divorsié*). Among several words which seem to be *sui generis* are *gibigian-a*, the flashing play of light reflected from mirrors (such as produced by a disco ball), and *aluch*, the sudden

and apparently dramatic improvement in condition exhibited by some terminally ill people just before death.

Later historical borrowings reflect increased contacts with more distant lands: words from German (*tòta*, young girl, *beus*, bitter, said of unripe fruit), English (*bocseur*, pugilist), Arabic (*fardel*, outfit, trousseau, *coefa*, bonnet), Hungarian (*sàber*, sabre, *sacò*, csako—the helmet worn by Hussars), Spanish (*lùn-es*, Monday, *màrtès*, Tuesday, *creada*, domestic maid, the last through Jewish-Piemontèis), Amerindian (*acasó*, cashew, *tomàtica*, tomato) and many other languages are easy to find. Particularly numerous are words of Greek origin, often through Latin, which are prominent in scientific vocabulary (*sirògi*, surgeon). Most numerous are undoubtedly the contributions from French and Occitan, which together form roughly 30% of Piemontèis vocabulary. These two languages (including their varieties) have been inextricably entwined with Piemontèis at all periods. Even smaller groups within Piemonte have profoundly affected the language; for example, Jewish communities provided words such as *tafus*, prison, *ursaj*, anniversary of someone's death, *màusser*, crude, ill-mannered, *gòim*, gentiles, among others.

Of course the Italian language itself has provided a large number of words specific to the culture of the Peninsula: *mafia*, which, in addition to the crime organization also means arrogance; *siòper*, from *sciopero*, strike; *scontrin*, from *scontrino*, sales slip; *òpera*, the opera; and even *gelato*, ice cream, often used instead of *gelà*. Already centuries ago Italian words had replaced earlier ones: *capì*, to understand; *ciamé*, to call, but also to ask; even *sì*, yes, is heard more often than *é* or *eui*. Yet recent decades have seen the wholesale importation of Italian vocabulary which is obviously of an entirely different nature than borrowing from another language when there is truly a need to do so. The main result of this intrusion has been the replacement of already-existing words, often with non-exact equivalents (or creating an outright reduction in vocabulary because an equivalent concept doesn't exist in Italian), and if taken to its conclusion would mean the replacement of the entire lexicon and syntax.

<b>English</b>	<b>Italiano</b>	<b>Français</b>	<b>Ousitan</b>	<b>Piemontèis</b>
<b>father</b>	padre	père	paire	<b>pare</b>
<b>sister</b>	sorella	soeur	souere	<b>seur</b>
<b>baby</b>	bambino	bébé	meinà	<b>masnà,</b>
<b>house</b>	casa	maison	mesoun	<b>ca, meison</b>
<b>eye</b>	occhio	oeil	uei	<b>euj</b>
<b>fire</b>	fuoco	feu	fuec	<b>feu</b>
<b>water</b>	acqua	eau	aigo	<b>eva</b>
<b>sweet</b>	dolce	douce	dous	<b>doss</b>
<b>yes</b>	si	oui	voué	<b>é, eui</b>
<b>sing</b>	cantare	chanter	chantar	<b>canté</b>
<b>believe</b>	credere	croire	creire	<b>crèje</b>
<b>sleep</b>	dormire	dormir	dourmir	<b>durmi, deurme</b>
<b>dog</b>	cane	chien	chin	<b>can</b>
<b>wolf</b>	lupo	loup	lou	<b>luv</b>
<b>want</b>	volere	vouloir	vouler	<b>vorèj</b>
<b>yellow</b>	giallo	jaune	jòoun	<b>giàun</b>
<b>hundred</b>	cento	cent	cen	<b>sent</b>
<b>day</b>	giorno	jour	journ	<b>di</b>
<b>night</b>	<b>notte</b>	<b>nuit</b>	<b>nuech</b>	<b>neuit</b>

Just as it has always done, Piemontèis has incorporated recent words from the global community, many of these of an international character: *facsé*, to fax, and *compùter* (in addition to earlier *elaborator*), computer, as well as calques such as *la Rèj*, the Internet, and *disch ës-ciass*, compact disk. Perhaps here it should be emphasized again that unlike many other “unrecognized” languages, Piemontèis has been fortunate to possess a *koinè* to give it region-wide viability. By contrast, the Occitan speakers in Piemonte, while having been granted a sort of belated state recognition, regrettably do not have a particular spoken variety which can be used and easily understood beyond the immediate local community. Yet there remains a daunting challenge for Piemontèis to adapt to the fast-changing world and remain a viable modern language without sacrificing its uniqueness. This is not because it is linguistically ill-equipped to do so—quite to the contrary, it has demonstrated a versatility arguably greater than that of the national language—but rather because the number of speakers has fallen precipitously to a critical level, and it remains banned from all official use.

### ***Syntax***

Piedmontese grammar is the result of radical simplifications of its ancestral Latin base. Its direct parent is neither Classical nor even Vulgar Latin, but the “Latin” (actually early Romance) of post-Roman Gaul. While sharing in many of the simplifications occurring in most other Romance languages, it was from this early Gallo-Romance heritage that Piemontèis acquired its earliest distinctive features. In fact, one of its most basic and typologically “troubling” features—the formation of plural nouns—can be traced to the

conservative retention of a 2-case system (“subject” and “oblique”) peculiar to early Gallo-Romance, where the subject case had an unmarked masculine plural but a feminine plural in –s, and the oblique case had both masculine and feminine plurals in s. It was the oblique plural which generalized to all cases in other varieties of later Gallo-Romance, as well as in Rheto-Romance and Ibero-Romance, while Piemontèis opted for the plural of the subject case, eventually resulting in generally unmarked nouns of masculine gender and a vowel change in words of feminine gender (with the disappearance of final -s).

In its general syntax Piemontèis was originally quite similar to its neighboring languages, but towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century verb endings became simplified further, and speakers began to employ a second set of subject pronouns to make the verb more explicit for person and number. The extra pronouns “ossified” to the point of becoming agreement markers attached to the verb whether it was preceded by a pronoun or explicit subject, or not. This system of subject clitics placed before the finite verb has remained a distinguishing feature of the modern language:

(Lor) a lesìo a vos àuta.

They were reading out loud.

(Nojàit) i lesìo a vos àuta.

We were reading out loud.

An lesìo a vos àuta.

They were reading to us out loud.

I-j lesìo a vos àuta.

We were reading to them out loud.

Also distinctive is the formation of the negative. At about the same time subject clitics were developing, the adverb *ne*, “not”, placed before the verb, began to regularly appear with a reinforcing particle, *nen(t)*, “nothing”, or *pa*, from French *pas*, “a step”, placed after the verb. Eventually *ne* disappeared entirely, leaving the reinforcing particles as post-verbal negatives. The modern language still employs both of these negatives as essentially equivalent alternatives.

Compared to the grammar of other Romance languages, Piemontèis exhibits a strong tendency toward structural simplification, both by

shortening and rendering verb inflections more uniform, and by eliminating a number of irregularities which were inherited from Latin. The first conjugation Latin verb form *-āre* regularly gives French *-er* and standard Piemontèis *-é*: *baptisāre* > Fr. *baptiser*, Piem. *batié*. Second conjugation Lat. *vidēre* gives Piem. *vèje* (with Turinese *vèdde* from Tuscan influence), Fr. *voire*, and It. *vedere*. Third conjugation Lat. *pendere* > Piem. *pende* and Fr. *pendre*. A large number of verbs deriving from Latin third and fourth conjugation verbs have two infinitive forms in Piemontèis and are termed “*verb fostonant*”, or “productive verb(s)”: e.g., Lat. *sentīre* > Piem. *sente* or *sentì*; deponent Lat. *morīrī* > Piem. *murì* or *meuire*; Lat. [de+] *aperīre* > Piem. *durvì* or *deurve*. Other fourth conjugation Latin *-īre* gives Piem. *-ì*: e.g., *finì*, with present verb stem *finiss-*, as in *a finisso*, they finish.

Piemontèis has retained some irregular 1<sup>st</sup> conjugation verbs, these usually being the most common ones, including *fé*, to do; *andé*, to go; *dé*, to give (prevailing over the regular form *doné*), and *dì*, to say. Verbs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> conjugation have been made more uniform by supplementing the irregular participial forms derived from Latin with past participles regularly ending in *-ù* (including fem. gender forms *-ùà*, *-ùe*): *vdù*, seen, in addition to *vist*; *componù*, composed, along with *compòst*; *comprendù*, included, understood, along with *compchèis*. These older, irregular forms have been retained in the capacity of adjectives rather than past participles (except for *vist*, which can alternate with *vdù*). Thus we have, *A l’ha cusù na bela fricassà*, “She cooked a nice frittomisto”, but *La fricassà a l’è cheuita*, “The frittomisto is cooked”. These newer synthetic forms are tied to the diachronic change of object clitic position in compound tenses from one originally before the auxiliary verb to an intermediate stage where the preverbal object clitic was copied at the end of the participle, to one where the original preverbal clitic disappeared, leaving just the one at the end of the participle. The result is that in order to facilitate comprehension the participle always ends in a vowel when a clitic is attached (excepting aforementioned *vist*): *A l’han componujlo*, “They composed it for them”. In the case of verbs such as *fé* or *dì*, the irregular past participles are modified when taking clitics: *Còs l’has-to fàit?* “What have you (sing.) done?”, but *I l’oma falo sta matin*, “We’ve done it this morning.

The conjugation of the verb *parlé*, or speak, is as follows:

<b>Infinitive</b>	<b>Past Participle</b>	<b>Gerund</b>	<b>Present Participle</b>	
parlé	parlà	parland	parlant	
<b>Person</b>	<b>Present Indicative</b>		<b>Present Subjunctive</b>	
	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st</b>	i parlo	i parloma	ch'i parla	ch'i parlo
<b>2nd</b>	it parle	i parle	ch'it parle	ch'i parle
<b>3rd</b>	a parla	a parlo	ch'a parla	ch'a parlo

<b>Person</b>	<b>Imperfect Indicative</b>		<b>Imperfect Subjunctive</b>	
	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st</b>	i parlava	i parlavo	ch'i parlèissa	ch'i parlèisso
<b>2nd</b>	it parlave	i parlave	ch'it parlèisse	ch'i parlèisse
<b>3rd</b>	a parlava	a parlavo	ch'a parlèissa	ch'a parlèisso

<b>Person</b>	<b>Perfect Indicative</b>		<b>Perfect Subjunctive</b>	
	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>

<b>1st</b>	i l'hai parlà	i l'oma parlà	ch'i l'abia parlà	ch'i l'abio parlà
<b>2nd</b>	it l'has parlà	i l'eve parlà	ch'it l'abie parlà	ch'i l'abie parlà
<b>3rd</b>	a l'ha parlà	a l'han parlà	ch'a l'abia parlà	ch'a l'abio parlà

<b>Person</b>	<b>Pluperfect Indicative</b>		<b>Pluperfect Subjunctive</b>	
	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st</b>	i l'avia parlà	i l'avio parlà	ch'i l'hèissa parlà	ch'i l'hèisso parlà
<b>2nd</b>	it l'avie parlà	i l'avie parlà	ch'it l'hèisse parlà	ch'i l'hèisse parlà
<b>3rd</b>	a l'avia parlà	a l'avio parlà	ch'a l'hèissa parlà	ch'a l'hèisso parlà

<b>Person</b>	<b>Present Conditional</b>		<b>Past Conditional</b>	
	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st</b>	i parleria	i parlerio	i l'avria parlà	i l'avrio parlà
<b>2nd</b>	it parlerie	i parlerie	it l'avrie parlà	i l'avrie parlà
<b>3rd</b>	a parleria	a parlerio	a l'avria parlà	a l'avrio parlà

<b>Person</b>	<b>Future Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Future Perfect Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
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<b>1st</b>	i parlerai	i parleroma	i l'avrai parlà	i l'avroma parlà
<b>2nd</b>	it parleras	i parlereve	it l'avras parlà	i l'avreve parlà
<b>3rd</b>	a parlerà	a parleran	a l'avrà parlà	a l'avran parlà

<b>Person</b>	<b>Imperative</b>	
	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1st</b>	_____	parloma
<b>2nd</b>	parla	parlé
<b>3rd</b>	ch'a parla	ch'a parlo

Notably lacking in modern speech is the past perfect inherited from Latin, which became extinct around the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the compound present perfect assuming that function. Several authors have resurrected this old tense, called *passà leugn*, for special cases when they wish to give a historical flavor to their writing. By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century this tense had already acquired a simplified synthetic form, losing just about all its irregular verbs in the process. The following is for *parlé*:

### **Past, or Historical, Perfect**

	<b>sing.</b>	<b>plur.</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	i parlere	i parlero
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	it parlere	i parlere
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	a parler	a parlero

Once more commonly used than it is now, the interrogative conjugation, like the imperative which doesn't have subject clitics, is exceptional. In this case the clitics are optional:

### **Interrogative Present Indicative**

	<b>sing.</b>	<b>plur.</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	(i) parl-ne?	(i) parl-ne?
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	(it) parlës-to?	(i) parle(ve)?
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	(a) parl-lo, -la?	(a) parl-ne?

Indicating a question solely through voice inflection has become increasingly common since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the point where the above forms are now only occasionally used in the spoken language, although they remain fairly common in the literary language.

Forming an adverb by attaching the suffix *-ment* to an adjective has always existed in Piemontèis, as in other Romance languages: *completament, naturalment*. However, the modern language tends to avoid this construction where practicable, using a locution: *a parlava modestament*, he spoke modestly, for example, might be more commonly expressed as *a parlava an manera modesta*, he spoke in a modest manner, or *a parlava con modestia*, ~with modesty. In other cases certain common adjectives or conventionalized forms may be employed as adverbs: *a parlava dosman*, he spoke gently, where *dosman* is in fact from Fr. *doucement*, with the original *-ment* suffix after all.

### ***Popular Expressions***

Employed by all classes of society, Piemontèis has historically been a language of everyday life, and as such has collected an impressive (some might say excessive) repertoire of traditional sayings and expressions which, be they witty and wise, or silly and small-minded, contribute in no small part to the liveliness and humor

that often engender in speakers feelings of affection and nostalgia for their language. To give but a few examples:

*Vnì a taj*, “to come in handy”, also found in this most oft-quoted of sayings that aptly illustrates Piedmontese thrift: *Tut a ven a taj, fin-a j’onge a plé l’aj*, “Everything comes in handy, down to the fingernails to peel garlic.”

*Deje d’ euli ‘d gomo*, “Give it some elbow grease.”

*E bondì barba!* “And goodbye, Uncle!”—And that’s the end of that!

*Dé ‘l bleu a cheidun*, “to give the blue to someone”—to blow somebody off.

*S-ciao!* “Whatever!”

*Esse ancarpionà*, “to be marinated like a fish”—to be head-over-heels in love (alluding to the frozen position of the fish’s lips).

*Smijé n’ëstronz an s’un cadregon*, “to look like a turd on an armchair”—to look like a turd in a punchbowl; to stick out like a sore thumb.

*Pijé l’ancioa*, “to take the anchovy”—to get the booby-prize.

*Ciapé un an sël lobiòt*, “to catch one out on the balcony”—to catch someone in the act, particularly *in flagrante delictio*.

*Dòp d’avèj falì, tùit a san lòn ch’a andasià fàit*. “After having failed, everyone knows what was to have been done”—hindsight is easier than foresight.

*Chi a veul mangé l’amel a deuv nen avèj por dij savuj*. “Whoever wants to eat the honey mustn’t be afraid of the stingers.”

Certainly illustrative of the cautious Piemontèis mentality is this last example:

*A venta mai mostré tut lòn che un a l’ha, nì tut lòn che un a sà*. “It’s necessary never to show everything that one has, nor everything that one knows.”

### ***Early Literature***

Written Piemontèis extends back roughly a millennium. A few one-line inscriptions have been dated to before the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium but are difficult to interpret and ambiguous. The first significant written material is the well-known collection of sermons called the *Sermones Subalpini* which has been dated to sometime in the latter

half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century but may be a copy of an earlier document. These *Sermones* have been an important reference for a number of Romance linguists, providing an extensive attestation of a local vernacular tongue during a time when almost all writing was done exclusively in Latin. In addition this document has generated its share of controversy as the language contains puzzling variations in vocabulary along with grammatical features usually associated with trans-Alpine tongues; nevertheless, most scholars of Piemontèis see the language as a legitimate ancestor of the modern idiom.

Several documents of incontestably Piemontèis character survive from the following two centuries. Among these are the so-called *Parlamenti ed epistole* datable to the 13<sup>th</sup> cent., *Statuti della Compagnia di San Giorgio di Chieri*, of 1321, and the *il Detto del re e della regina* of the 14<sup>th</sup> cent. Some of these earliest manuscripts deal with everyday legal matters which concerned the local population and so had to be comprehensible to them. Typical of writing of this type are *la Sentenza di Rivalta* 1466, which deals with a marriage dissolution, and a lesser-known text, the *Atto di Poirino*, part of which is reproduced here to give an idea of a 15<sup>th</sup> century legalistic Piemontèis vernacular:

*susa lo qual comandament rezevù d'la soa Jllu. dominacion se d'bia elezer quatri omi inter lo present Consegl, li qual debiun ander a la soa presentia per part dela comunità a deverlo regratiar de tant bon amor e de tant bin ch'el demostra como signor benign chi ama la iusticia e la rasun, e chi ne vol che li soy bon sudit e fidel senn frustà de speysa. E como omi obedient a so signor chi no àn animo de desobedir a so signor ne de fer net che li despiasa, sì debiun dir e responder che de cascunna differentia, malanconia e querella, chi se ne possun esser d'li signor a li omi ni de li omi a li signor, se sotmetun e semper may se son sotmetù a so princi e a so sovràn signor como bon signor de justicia e de rason*

Other texts containing similar oaths and statutes are *le Recomendaciones del Laudario di Saluzzo*, and the *Ordinamenti della Compagnia dei Disciplinati di Dronero*, both of the 15<sup>th</sup> cent.

Another very early genre is a type of religious verse expressing the sorrow of Jesus' death. Of these, the most notable are the 14<sup>th</sup> century *Lamentatio Lacrimosa* and the 15<sup>th</sup> century *Lamentazione di Torino*, of which a verse is reproduced here:

Dolor n'ay al cor, no è longa  
ma via

ch'i m'an tolù mon figlol Yesù  
via.

Oy De, que farà la soa  
doleinta mare?

Ch'ì vezo morir col ch'è figl e  
pare,

de tut lo mond è apellà  
sarvare.

De dolor moray e no tarderò  
vare

ch'el mon figl è pandù si com  
s'el fus un lare!

Oy fi car, com trist è lo giorn  
doloros e amar.

“Sorrow of it I have in my  
heart, my life is not long

that they have taken my son  
Jesus away.

Oh God, what is his sorrowful  
mother to do?

That I see die he who is son  
and father,

By everyone is called savior.

I'll die of sorrow and won't linger  
much

since my son is hung thus as  
if he were a thief!

Oh dear son, how sad is the  
day, sorrowful and bitter.”

### ***Post-Medieval Literature***

Documents of such utilitarian or religious nature continued to be produced throughout the region into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Interesting is a 1791 text from Acqui, but written in the Turin-based koiné, which had already diffused this far from the capital.

Perhaps the story of Piemontèis literature in the stricter sense begins with the *Opera Jocunda* of Giovan Giorgio Alione published in 1521. Alione has been considered one of the earliest exponents of farce. He wrote primarily in Old Astigiano but utilized Turinese as

well for representing certain characters. During this period other popular literature appeared, including the *tòni*, a type of poetry expressing in droll or humorous terms the daily life of society's less fortunate.

By the 17<sup>th</sup> century literature in Piemontèis, if not exactly abundant, was no longer an extreme rarity. Among the most well-known works dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the century is the Marquis Tana's bilingual comedy, *Cont Piolet*.

### **18th Century**

Piemontèis really had its first literary flowering in the 1700's, when Turin-based speech, spread with the help of the Savoyard army and other organs of the state, became preeminent as a region-wide language. From this time forward most Piemontèis literature would be in the regional standard, while writing in local town dialects would become increasingly infrequent.

The first notable work of the period, which records in somewhat clumsy verse the Siege of Turin, one of the most famous incidents in the tempestuous history of Savoy, is *L'arpa discordata*, by Francisco Tarizzo.

During this century Padre Ignazio Isler (1702–1788), considered the first great writer in Piemontèis history, expanded the *tòni* form with his comic verses. Using simple, sometimes grotesque, but honest language, his poems painted an overall picture of the lives of deprivation and fantasies of abundance which afflicted his parishioners and contemporaries, along with their personalities, quirks, and foibles. It was from his work that Piemontèis poetic literature took much of its initial inspiration, benefiting from his simple, satiric, but cultivated style.

Roughly contemporary with Isler was the poet Silvio Balbis (1737-1796) whose sonnets were popular among the upper classes with whom he associated. Meanwhile, the *tòni* continued in their popularity, and under the cover of anonymity often served as political ridicule directed against this policy or that individual. It

was in such a vein of social criticism that poet Giuseppe Avventura (1733-1777) frequently dealt with the abuses of the nobility and the clergy. His courageous writing opened the way for the even greater role that Piemontèis literature would subsequently play in social criticism.

Edoardo Calvo (1783-1804), writing under the period of Piemonte's annexation to France, attracted hostile attention from the authorities through his fiercely anti-French and anti-nobility poetic and theatrical works, at one point having to escape from Turin. Among his better-known works are the *Fàule moraj* and *L'Artaban bastonà*.

### La spa e la lumassa rablòira

Ant un 'd coj castej frust ch'a-i stà le masche,  
famos ant ij sò temp pèr soe gran tor,  
sgarblà, tut mes distrust, cuvert ëd frache,

a l'era mancomal tuta ruznenta,  
ma tant, an mes al ruso, un sert barlum,  
mostrava ancor l'origine lusenta.

La spa 's buta a crijé: - Son pa na msòira,  
am pijs-to per na ressia o pr'un faussèt,  
per n'apia, per na ranza o na tisòira?

- E adess, - l'àutra a-j rispond, - mi te  
scarcagno  
s'i veuj mi it pisso adòss, e con ij còrn,  
se mi 'in batèiss con ti, tant it  
guadagno.

pèr là ant una caverna a-i era ancor,  
sotrà an mes al rotam, a la rumenta,  
la spa ch'un dì portava col gran sgnor;

Rablandse, com a l'é ant ël sò costum,  
slogand ij còrn, na lumassa rablòira  
a-j é momaje adòss caria 'd bavum.

Sapia che mi ant ël sécol ëd Bajasèt,  
ai temp dël Re Artù e ed Carlo Magno,  
i tajava ij Paladin com 'd ravanèt!

Sta fàula a dev gaveje 'l capéstorn,  
a coj ch'a vivo mach pr'ampisse 'd bòria,  
buté na pugnà 'd paja drint a 'n forn,  
a fà l'istess efèt la vòstra glòria.

-E. Calvo

Concomitant with the growth in literature was an increasing interest in vocabulary and grammar. At this time the aforementioned court physician Morissi Pipin published the first Piemontèis dictionary and grammar. While the quality of neither works was of a very high level, the linguistic information that he

furnished is nonetheless invaluable. He distinguished three varieties of speech based on social class then in use around Turin—a *courtesan*, a *vulgar*, and a *plebeian* pronunciation. Of this class distinction in speech nothing survives.

Following Pipin, Carlo Denina wrote the *Clef des langues* in 1804, stating that but for historical events, Piemontèis itself would have become an official language. His sentiment was echoed by Louis Capello ten years later in the latter's dictionary: *Sans prétendre donner ici une idée avantageuse de notre langage, je conviendrai avec M. l'abbé Charles Denina que si le dialecte piémontais eût été cultivé du temps du premier Duc Amédée VIII ou seulement d'Emmanuel Philibert, il serait devenu dans ce moment une langue illustre, au moins autant que le sont la Portugaise et la Hollandaise, dont l'une est à l'Espagnole, l'autre à l'Allemande ce que la Piémontaise est à l'Italienne.*

Piemontèis lexicography steadily improved through successive dictionaries by Zalli (1815), Ponza (1827), and most notably, Sant'Albino (1859).

From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>, a considerable quantity of poetry was produced, often written anonymously or signed with just a first name. Included among the known personalities to leave us verses in Piemontèis (but only two) was Astigiano nobleman Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803). A far more prolific writer about whom virtually nothing else is known was “Pegemade”. Of his three plays, his first, *Èl nodar onorà* is the best known. In addition to artistic worth, theatrical works such as these have immense historical and cultural value, providing us with glimpses into the daily life and language of Savoy during this period. Other important works from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are the anonymous play entitled *Le ridicole illusioni* with its strong political conscience—suspected by Professor Clivio of actually being an unsigned work of Edoardo Calvo, writings from Maurizio Bertetti, or *Barba Morissi.*, principally in the form of leaflets, the *Rime piemontesi* of priest Agostino Bosco da Poirino, and the writing of Carlo Casalis, including his moralizing verse and the comedy, *La festa dla pignata.*

## 19th Century

In the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, literary work in Piemontèis declined, the victim of a society now rigidly censored and controlled by religion and the court. Yet writing continued even during this relatively bleak period, and if most of it lacked significant literary value, several works of some merit were produced, such as the didactic poems of Dominican priest Raimondo Feraudi, or “Fauride Nicomedan”, who left us the *Rimedi sicurissim contra le petecchie ossia nouvèla moural piémontejsa* (1817), and the works of lawyer Giovanni Pansoya (ca. 1830). In addition, due to neglect of this period by literary historians, previously unknown authors have only recently come to the fore, thanks to research undertaken in larger library collections by people like writer Dario Pasé, who discovered the theatrical works of Count Francesco Matis (1784-1858).

It was during this time (1834) that the first Piemontèis translation of the Bible was made. This was carried out not by the Catholic Church, but rather by the Waldensian Church, concerned as it was with making religious scripture accessible to everyone through universal education. That Piemontèis, and not a local Occitan *patouà*, was preferred for the Waldensian Bible says something about its widespread use during this time.

Along with the changed political climate of the *Restaurazione*, the linguistic orientation of Piemonte shifted to the much greater use of Tuscan from this period onward, although French remained the language of culture for the aristocracy almost until the creation of Italy. The resulting relationship of Piemontèis to Tuscan was now that of a language completely subordinate to a politically more powerful one. Several writers were quick to exploit this situation by writing grammars or dictionaries with the aim of making their readers proficient in the language of Italy. Don Michele Ponza, already mentioned for his dictionary, was a professor of Latin and Italian, who also wrote a Piemontèis grammar and texts to help students with this task.

Literary activity suddenly revived in the 1830's with the arrival on the scene of one of the most illustrious political and literary

personalities—who fortunately made Piemontèis his vehicle of revolutionary fervor—Angelo Brofferio (1802-1866). His poetry and songs remain popular today as then, such as *La barchëtta* and *Mè ritorn*. Also noteworthy is the work of his contemporary, Norberto Rosa (1803-1862).

While plays had been written as far back as the 1600's, the first real flowering of the Piemontèis stage occurred in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its popularity was such as to attract all levels of society, and hundreds of plays were composed, of which a fair number have withstood the test of time as great theater. A representative of the best of these might be the masterpiece of Vittorio Bersezio (1830-1890), *Le miserie 'd Monsù Travet* (1863), even mentioned in histories of Italian literature as a notable work. Other illustrious playwrights of the period were Federico Garelli (1827-1885), Giovanni Zoppis (1830-1876), Luigi Pietracqua (1832-1901), and Eraldo Baretto (1846-1895).

Not only creation, but also preservation was the objective of renowned statesman Costantino Nigra (1828-1907), associate of Cavour and friend of the royal family, who during this period undertook the important ethnographic task of collecting and recording traditional songs and lyric poems from Piemonte's provinces, many of them already untold centuries old.

The vitality of Piemontèis theater in the late 1800's was almost equaled by a vigorous popular literature, published in the myriad periodicals that sprang up, thrived for a few years, then disappeared. The first of these was the *Gasëtta d' Gianduja*, founded by Luigi Pietracqua, soon succeeded by others such as '*L Birichin*, *giornal piemonteis satirich, leterari, sportiv, umoristich, social*, lasting from 1885-1924, *L'Aso*, '*L Bicerin*, and *La Bicerifia*. A group of poets writing for these periodicals, in particular for '*L Birichin*, who carried through to the next century, created for the most part unmemorable work, parochial and rather trite, but they sufficed for their readers, primarily Turinese, who no longer esteemed the indigenous language as they once had. Nevertheless, a few poets of this period are notable, among them Alberto Viriglio (1851-1913), Alfonso Ferrero (1873-1933), and Arrigo Frusta (1875-

1965), an early contributor to *L Birichin*, but continuing on to serve as a bridge from *ël pcit mond antich* to *ël mond neuw* of Piemontèis literature.

About this time, alongside the verse in the periodicals was born the Piemontèis novel, typically of the potboiler variety, to be sure, with screwball twisted plots, madcap adventure, and few pretensions to literary distinction; nevertheless, it found an appreciative audience—a populace looking to be entertained and not yet comfortable with embracing a largely foreign language and culture in their homes. This very important genre, however, soon had its talented exponents—the already-noted Luigi Pietracqua, one of whose many acclaimed works was *Don Pipeta l’Asilé*. In addition, Carlo Ferrero, Carlo Borio (1882-1920), and Carolina Invernizio (1858-1916), whose *Ij delit d’na bela fia* ushered in the Piemontèis tearjerker, contributed to the development of the form.

## **20th Century**

Writing generally continued into the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in this rather superficial populist vein until the formation of the most influential literary movement in the history of modern Piemontèis—that started under the periodical *Ij Brandé*, founded by Pinin Pacòt (1899-1964), together with writers Vigin Fiochet and Oreste Gallina. The members immediately sought to change the course of Piemontèis literature by disavowing any previous narrow, dialectal outlook fixated solely on local or “traditional” subject matter and increasingly clichéd and Italianized; rather, they affirmed that Piemontèis should take its rightful place as a national language alongside, not beneath, Tuscan. Probably the most important of the principles they laid down was that Piemontèis could, should, and *would* be used to express any and all subject matter found in any other language, be it of a literary, historical, scientific, technical, or other nature. In fact, a few exemplary writers outside this circle were following a similar course: popular writer Nino Costa (1886-1945), and the master of lyric prose, Nino

Autelli (1923-1945), had already prefigured some of these modern ideals. Another major accomplishment that would help to implement this principle was establishing an updated, standard orthography, based largely on the traditions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century but with a few modifications to express all the particular sounds of Piemontèis in as explicit a manner as possible. It was named the *Brandé* system, and while not without shortcomings, it has remained the preferred way of writing Piemontèis up to the present day. Unfortunately, the formation of the *Brandé* group in 1927 coincided with the rise of Italian Fascism. In the climate of intolerance and persecution the magazine was soon shut down, but not without having first rescued written Piemontèis from the ignominy of being a *dialetto* and sent it on its way as a world language, albeit an embattled one.

With the War's end in 1946 the magazine was reborn as *Ij Brandé, giornal ëd poesia piemontèisa*. This time the bimonthly enjoyed a longer run, putting out its last issue in 1957. During that decade Pinin Pacòt and his associates would finish articulating their principles and put them into practice in the journal. With the *Compania dij Brandé* poetry became a truly personal vehicle of expression, frequently eschewing convention and incorporating new forms and themes.

A much larger circle of writers and playwrights were strongly influenced by the ideals of Pacòt and his associates. Alfreda Nicola (1902-1995), Armando Mottura (1905-1976), Carlottina Rocco (1908-1992), and Luigi Olivero (1909-1996) are just a few outstanding names who carried forward the new literature.

Among these post-war luminaries, special mention should be made of a most idiosyncratic poet and personality—Antonio Bodrero (1921-1998), or as he is known in Piemontèis, *Barba Tòni Bodré*, or again, as he is called in Ousitan, *Barbo Toni Boudriè*. For a writer to earn the honorific and affectionate title of *barba*, or uncle, is certainly no small distinction, and even rarer still to bear this in two different languages. A native of Frassinò in Val Varaita, he grew up speaking the local Occitan of the community, as well as Piemontèis. He was one of a small group of 20<sup>th</sup> century writers involved in both

an Occitan cultural moviment and a Piemontèis one. As intertwined historically as these two languages were in Piemonte, it was Piemontèis which tended to dominate and encroach on Occitan, creating antipathy toward it on the part of many Occitan writers. Bodrero himself was not without some of these ambivalent feelings, yet ultimately he felt that the two were essentially the sister languages of two linked cultures with a shared destiny of eventual emancipation from the Italian State. He went on to create modern Occitan poetry along with Piemontèis verses that he enriched with Occitan-influenced vocabulary (already a tendency in southwestern Cuneo Province), all in his highly personal, alliterative style. Another great writer to work within this double heritage was Tavio Cosio (1923-1989), and subsequent writers have continued to do likewise.

### CÒ A FÀ..?

Cò a fà col ch'a l'ha fàit  
 «pèt!» pèr la stra?  
 as vira: a-i é cheidun ch'a  
 l'ha sentù?  
 e a seugna fin-a la saliva a  
 ciàira:  
 «Com a l'é bel tiré 'd pèt an  
 sità!  
 pa gnun ch'a sent con tut  
 col ghet fotù,  
 gnanca la fiàira.  
 Ma 'nt ij pais, ahi, at ciamo  
 pèr nòm  
 e at diso: — Is doma d'arie  
 nèh, brav òm»  
 e ti?:  
 «Le mòto as dan pì d'arie  
 'ncó che mi,  
 a pëtto tut ël di,  
 ma tüt a-i vardo bele li  
 'mbajà  
 e s'a san nen fé n' "ò!" con  
 n'ambossor  
 con la boca a lo fan». «Pèt a  
 motor».

### WHAT DOES HE DO..?

What does he do who has  
 done “fart!” in the street?  
 he turns: is there someone  
 who’s heard?  
 and he dreams until the  
 saliva clears:  
 “How nice it is to cut farts in  
 the city!  
 ain’t nobody that notices  
 with all that fricking racket,  
 not even the stink!  
 But in the country, ow, they  
 call you by name  
 and they tell you:—we give  
 ourselves airs, eh, good  
 man”  
 and you?  
 “The motorbikes give  
 themselves more airs than  
 even me,  
 they fart the whole day,  
 but everybody watches there  
 agape,  
 and if they don’t know how

to go “honk!” with a horn  
they do it with their mouth.”  
“Engine farts.”

—T. Bodriè

### ***Present Day***

It’s difficult to give a fair enumeration of writers from the present period. Perhaps ironically, at a time when Piemontèis is most threatened with extinction, there are arguably more distinguished writers than at any previous period, although the output is certainly heavily weighted towards poetry, with full-length novels the most under-represented. This unbalanced situation is probably at least partly because of the difficulties created by a political policy that discourages readership in minority languages. Combined with the high cost of publishing, it effectively limits literary efforts to the “safest” choices—such as slim anthologies with Italian translations.

There are a few current dominant personalities who continue to play decisive roles in the preservation and shaping of the language. Camillo Brero (1926) might be considered *primus inter pares* in this regard. The author of several popular grammars as well as the compiler of one of two authoritative dictionaries of the language, this senior member of the literary confraternity is also known for numerous poems and some prose, as well as for a translation of the New Testament.

Censin Pich (1930), Tavo Burat (1932), Dario Pasé, Canadian-based Bruno Villata (prolific author of scholarly works, including a grammar and an academic giornal, published in Montréal), Sergi Gilardin, and Gianrenzo Clivio; Gianfranco Gribaudo (compiler of the other major dictionary), Albina Malerba, Anita Giraudi, Michela Grosso (who has also written a popular, concise grammar), and Bianca Dorato, are just a few of the most influential names. In addition to those who write exclusively in koiné, there are many who use local varieties very effectively, especially in poetry.

Particularly active is a group of younger poets based in the area around Mondovì.

### ***Literary Publications & Organizations***

There are currently numerous magazines, some of which are connected to particular literary organizations. *La Slòira*, directed by Tavo Burat, *Piemontèis ancheuj*, *L' Arvista dl' Academia*, *Armanach dij Brandé*, directed by Brero, *Nòstre Tor*, published by the *Famija albèisa*, are but a few of the publications which continue to attract literary talent. Organizations such as *Gioventura Piemontèisa* and *Piemont Dev Vive* seek to educate through language instruction and the creation of teaching materials. Mention should also be made of the prestigious *Ca dë Studi Piemontèis*, or *Centro Studi Piemontesi*, which publishes tracts on all aspects of Piemontèis historical culture. Considering the high cost of publishing in hard copy, disseminating works on-line has been a salvation for many organizations who frequently find themselves short of funds.

An avenue for the non-professional writer to participate in literary activity is through the various annual competitions open to anyone who has work to submit. These include a theater competition sponsored by the Regione Piemonte, and the writing contests hosted by cities throughout the region.

### ***Future of Piemontèis Literature***

Considering the difficulties and setbacks that Piemontèis literature has faced, one can justly say that its distinguished history is all the more remarkable, as is the overall high quality of contemporary work. That being said, it's equally evident—as was pointed out earlier—that many areas remain under-explored and underdeveloped. There doesn't seem to be a slackening in literary output from the younger generation, yet we know that those involved in writing *anything* are but a tiny minority of the general population, which is perilously close to losing virtually all of its speakers. Who then will be left to read the wonderful poetry or engrossing story and enjoy the engaging play that can say to a

Piedmontese in a few terse phrases what can't be exactly expressed in another tongue?

It may be that the outcome will be decided as much by the degree of political autonomy granted to regional administration as by the commitment of individuals to keep the flame of the *Brandé* burning.

*The above was in no way intended as a comprehensive overview of such a complex, involved subject. While I've tried to be accurate, it may still require correction and improvement, and will always be subject to revision. ✍ K. McCabe*

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