

A case-study on proper nouns formed by *-exit* in Contemporary Italian

Mauro Le Donne
University of South Bohemia
mauroledon@gmail.com

1. Introduction

This study investigates the micro-diachronic trend and the morphotactic features of the lexical innovations formed by *-(e)xit* (Mattiello 2018; Caffarelli 2018; Lalić-Krstin & Silaški 2019) in Contemporary Italian.¹ The data consists of English *complex loanwords* (1a-c) and Anglo-Italian *hybrid formations* (2a-c) (Seifart 2015) extracted from two different Italian web corpora:

- (1) a. *Irex*it ‘hypothetical withdrawal of Ireland from the EU’ < *Ireland* / *Irish*
b. *Faragexit* ‘call for the resignation of Nigel Farage’ < (*Nigel*) *Farage*
c. *Nato-exit* ‘hypothetical withdrawal from NATO’ < *NATO*
- (2) a. *Romexit* ‘delocalisation of companies from Rome’ < *Roma* ‘Rome’
b. *Gentilexit* ‘withdrawal of support for Paolo Gentiloni’ < (*Paolo*) *Gentiloni*
c. *Tavexit* ‘suspension of the fundings for the TAV project’ < *TAV*²

Even if the source language cannot always be determined with certainty, it is argued that the items in (1a-c) were borrowed by remote-contact (mostly) with English, whereas the items in (2a-c) have been formed *extracting* and *extending* the pattern on native stems of the recipient language (i.e. Italian) (Seifart 2015; Gardani 2021). With regard to the morphological status of *-(e)xit* in this pattern, it could be argued that it is open to at least two different interpretations:

- (i) since it originally appeared as the right-hand constituent of a semi-complete blend (i.e. *Grex*it < *Greek Euro Area exit*) (Ronneberger-Sibold 2006), *-(e)xit* could be considered an output of blending, that is, a splinter (Berman 1961; Adams 1973), or a “morphemised splinter”, occurring in other co-hyponymic blends (Lalić-Krstin & Silaški 2019: 228);³
- (ii) since it appears in different words in a paradigmatic series, *-(e)xit* could be considered an exponent of this series (Montermini 2018: 433-435).⁴

¹ The label Contemporary Italian indicates the variety of Italian spoken nowadays, whose specific features are described in D’Achille (2003).

² The extended form of the initialism *TAV* is It. *Treno ad Alta Velocità* ‘high-speed train’. When not otherwise specified, the second constituent (i.e. *exit*) is not reported to avoid redundancy.

³ Indeed, even if there is no formal reduction of *-(e)xit* in *Grex*it or *Brex*it, the reduced splinter *-xit* is also attested. However, not all scholars would agree on this hypothesis, according to the assumption that blends “cannot form series” (Fradin 2015: 390).

⁴ This exponent could be either classified as an affixoid or as a combining form. Indeed, it takes a more specific meaning than its verbal and nominal counterparts, i.e. *to exit* and *the exit*. For instance, it refers to a call for the resignation of a politician in (1b), or to the hypothetical withdrawal of a political entity in (1a) and (1c).

Leaving the treatment of *-(e)xit* as an exponent to future works, in this study, it will be considered as in (i). A unified treatment of the two lexical sets in (1a-c) and (2a-c) is justified on the basis of the same morphological (i) and semantic (ii) features, indeed:

- (i) both consist of blends formed by the combination of a proper noun and the sequence *-exit* which functions as the semantic head, yielding different degrees of reduction and possible overlap, e.g. *Bruxit* < *Bruxelles*, *Ponsexit* < *Ponsacco*; or even neither formal reduction nor overlap, e.g. *Greece-exit* < *Greece*, *Pragaexit* < *Praga* ‘Prague’;
- (ii) both exhibit many-to-many form-meaning relationships, that is, one form might correspond to multiple meanings, e.g. *Wexit* ‘call for the resignation of Arsène Wenger’ / ‘hypothetical secession of Canadian Western provinces’; and one meaning might correspond to multiple forms, e.g. *Itaexit* / *Italexit* / *Italiaexit* / *Italiexit* / *Itxit* ‘hypothetical withdrawal of Italy from EU’.

The research questions addressed in this study are the following:

- (i) How did this morphological process change through time in Contemporary Italian?
- (ii) Are there any differences in the morphological make-up of the two lexical sets as in (1a-c) and (2a-c)?

The sociolinguistic and lexicographic background of this morphological process will be discussed in Section 2, the methodology by which the items in (1a-c) and (2a-c) were extracted from two different web corpora of Italian will be illustrated in Section 3, the micro-diachronic trend of the *-exit* words will be examined in Section 4, along with their morphotactic features (4.1). Finally, in section 5, our conclusions will be drawn.

2. The origin of *-exit* and its spread in Contemporary Italian

As is well known, the emergency of *-exit* in English begun with the appearance of the proper noun *Grexit* in 2012, originally, the blend of an (ethnic) adjective and a noun (i.e. *exit*), specifically coined to shorten the syntagm *Greek Euro Area Exit* (Thornton 2016; Caffarelli 2018: 447). Even if the model became successful, at least to the point that some lexical innovation based on *Grexit* followed its coinage; its fate cannot be compared to the global fame of its co-hyponym *Brexit* (< *British exit*), which appeared shortly thereafter and can be considered the *leader word* of many subsequent analogical coinages (Thornton 2016; Mattiello 2018: 5-6; Lalić-Krstin & Silaški 2019: 223).⁵ Indeed, due to its popularity, *Brexit* was listed into the dictionaries and the neological data banks of various European languages, Italian included (Caffarelli 2018).⁶

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the spread of *Brexit* in different natural languages can be interpreted as a symptom of globalization, due to the increasing role of social media in contemporary communication (Antonelli 2016). The language of social media is peculiar for

⁵ The term *leader word* refers to words that are particularly salient in a word formation pattern, and that may serve as analogical model to derive new words (Rainer 2013: 152; Lasserre & Montermini 2015: 169).

⁶ In 2016 *Brexit* was officially recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (<https://www.oed.com/>). Beside English, *Brexit*’s entry has been listed in other lexicographic resources, for instance: in Italian (2016), see *Treccani*’s neological data bank (https://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana/neologismi/); in Spanish (apparently in 2017), see the *Diccionario panhispánico del español jurídico*, co-authored by the *Real Academia Española* (<https://dpej.rae.es/>); in French (2019), see *Larousse*’s dictionary (<https://www.larousse.fr/>); in German (2017), see *Duden*’s dictionary (<https://www.duden.de/>).

both its diaphasic and diamesic features, as it is influenced by the social prestige of English as *lingua franca*, as well as other sectoral and professional communities (Antonelli 2016; Cortelazzo 1988). Furthermore, social media facilitate the spread of “innovations in geographically discontinuous settings” (Sayers 2014: 192), by connecting distant speech communities and engaging an ever-growing number of users with their informality and interactivity. In this way, lexical innovations may circulate without any direct contact among speakers (Buchstaller *et al.* 2010; Grieve *et al.* 2016; Brasolin *et al.* 2023). Another pertinent aspect concerns the informalisation of political jargon, a change that has been acknowledged as a significant development in social media discourse, rendering this variety more appealing and accessible to a broader audience, even by the coinage of occasional, catchy words (Lalić-Krstin & Silaški 2019: 224; Brasolin *et al.* 2023: 5, 10).

Zooming in on the Italian sociolinguistic situation, it is well known that the exclusive usage of dialects in Italy has gradually given way to situational and stylistic usages alongside Italian, or rather, alongside Italian regional varieties (Lepschy & Lepschy 2019: 51-52; De Mauro 2016: 111-120). This is confirmed by De Mauro (2016), who reports that “[w]ithin the same conversation or discourse, speakers [...] shift from the standard language to the dialect or vice versa (*code-switching*), or else they blend words from the two different idioms (*code-mixing*)” (2016: 119).⁷ In this respect, it has been argued that many bilingual speakers “do not consider Italian a valuable heritage”, and that issues related to contact-induced language change may come from both external and internal sources (Marello 2020: 168-169). In other words, the bilingual attitude of many Italian speakers and the sociopolitical prestige of English in the varieties under scrutiny (i.e. the journalese, the jargon of politics) provide a fertile ground that could have led to the borrowing of complex loanwords (henceforth, CLs) in (1a-c), and, thereafter, to the extraction and extension of the morphological pattern by which hybrid formations (henceforth, HFs) in (2a-c) were formed.

In the context of this study, HFs are defined as words formed by a combination of a native left-hand base and a borrowed right-hand base, whereas CLs consist of two borrowed bases, with *exit* functioning as the borrowed right-hand constituent for both types of word formation.⁸ The extension of this pattern in Italian journalese could be witnessed by the frequent combination with different toponyms of Southern, Central and Northern Italy:

- (3) a. regions: *Ligurexit* (< *Liguria*), *Marchexit* (< *Marche*), *Calabrexit* (< *Calabria*)
- b. cities: *Triexit* (< *Trieste*), *Pescarexit* (< *Pescara*), *Napolexit* (< *Napoli* ‘Naples’)
- c. towns: *Trexit* (< *Trebaseleghe*), *Prexit* (< *Preturo*), *PA-exit* (< *Piazza Armerina*)

The word-formations in (3a-c) consistently refer to an Italian toponym, although with different levels of granularity. In fact, the toponym may refer to regions (3a), cities (3b) or towns (3c).⁹ Moreover, the items in (3a-c) share (more or less) the same semantic content: ‘(hypothetical) withdrawal from a socio-politic entity X’. Computing the geocoordinates of all the toponyms

⁷ “Nell’ambito di una stessa conversazione o di uno stesso discorso i parlanti [...] passano dalla lingua al dialetto o viceversa (*code switching*), oppure mescolano parole dei due idiomi diversi (*code mixing*)” (2016: 119).

⁸ In Seifart’s paper (2015), HFs are defined as the “combinations of the borrowed affix with native stems”, while CLs are defined as “combinations of the borrowed affix with likewise borrowed stems” (2015: 517). Since the present study does not deal with affixed words properly, these definitions are adopted in a looser sense.

⁹ It could still be argued that the (original) ethnic adjective is involved, as in *Grexit* (i.e. *Greek*) and *Brexit* (i.e. *British*), e.g. *Calabrexit* < (?*Calabria* / ?*calabrese* ‘Calabrian’). However, for many *-exit* words this hypothesis seems unlikely, e.g. *PA-exit* in 3c, *Siexit* (< *Siena* / **senese* ‘Sienese’), *Terni-exit* (< *Terni* / **ternano*). Note also that in many dictionaries the etymology of *Brexit* is *Britain exit* (see also Thornton 2016).

involved in the HFs extracted in this study, in Figure 1, it is possible to grasp the areal extension in which such (sometimes alleged) claims of socio-political autonomy raised debates:¹⁰

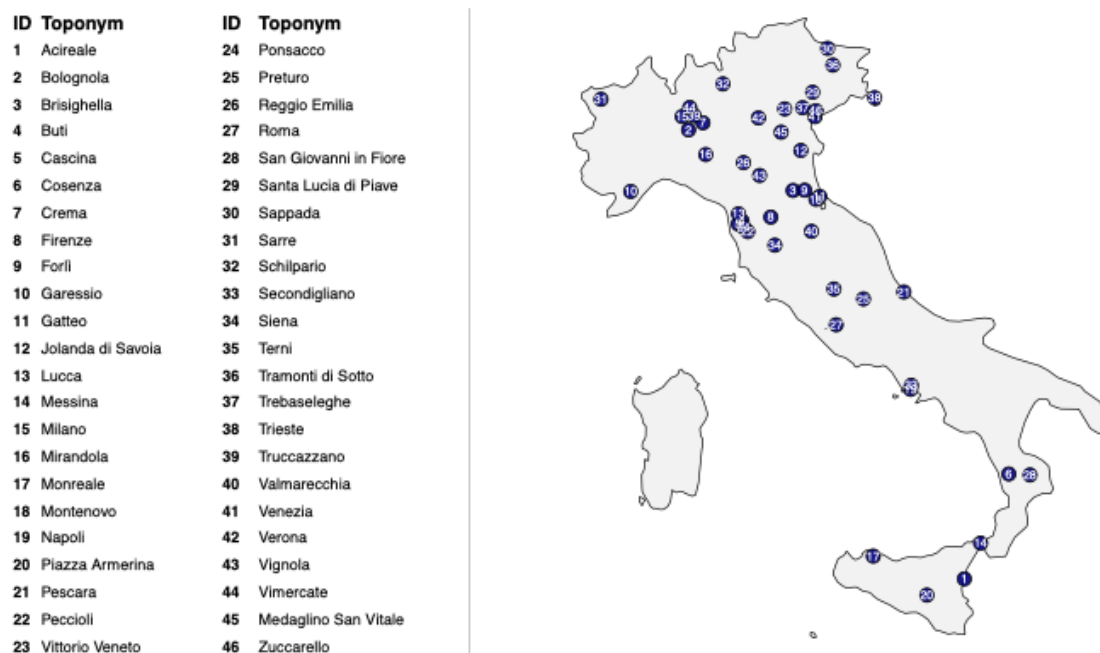


Figure 1. A map of Italian toponyms (cities and towns) involved in the -exit word formation process

3. Data gathering and annotation

The -exit words were extracted from two different web corpora of Italian: the static web corpus *Italian TenTen 2020* (henceforth ITT; Jakubiček *et al.* 2013); and a monitor, time-stamped corpus, *Italian Trends* (henceforth ITr; Herman *et al.* 2025), which is regularly updated with news articles provided by RSS feed since 2014 (Trampuš & Novak 2013). The two web corpora were selected for their suitability in relation to the specific phenomenon analysed in this study, a relatively recent word formation process, as the first -exit formation is attested only in 2012 (see Section 2). In this respect, both corpora are based on documents produced in the current and the preceding decade. Moreover, the large design of both makes it possible to retrieve many low-frequency items (e.g. *hapax* and *dis legomena*), thus ensuring a sufficiently rich sample.¹¹ In both cases, the process of semi-automatic extraction can be summarised in three steps:¹²

¹⁰ The map and the other plots in this paper were realised using the software R (R Core Team 2022) and the following libraries: *sf* (Pebesma 2018), *ggplot2* (Wickham 2016), *dplyr* (Wickham *et al.* 2023), *patchwork* (Pedersen 2024), *rnaturalearth* (Massicotte & South 2026).

¹¹ The ITT contains 14,514,566,714 tokens, 33,582,719 types, and 30,718,525 documents. At the time of writing, the ITr contains 12,333,693,644 tokens, 14,592,351 types, and 34,476,008 documents (accessed on 17/03/2026). As a monitor corpus, only .it documents of the decade 2014-2024 were considered in the extraction phase (see note 12). This subcorpus contains 8,182,953,879 tokens and accounts for 66.3% of the entire ITr.

¹² There is one specificity that must be mentioned. The time-stamped design of the ITr makes this corpus suitable for micro-diachronic analyses. Therefore, the extraction process was performed slightly differently. At first, the corpus was subdivided in 11 subcorpora, each one corresponding to a single year of the time span 2014-2024, i.e. 11 years in total. To ensure that the web articles were really produced in Italian, only the web pages with the .it domain were chosen for the extraction. The points listed in (i-iii) were thus repeated 11 times to obtain the ITr lexical dataset.

- (i) The CQL-tool available in *Sketch Engine* (Kilgariff *et al.* 2014) was used to retrieve all the tokens containing the string *-xit*, excluding very frequent false positives, e.g. the Latinism *resurrexit* or the loanword *exit*;
- (ii) The list of tokens (together with their co-textual occurrence) was downloaded in *.xml* format and manually-checked to obtain a list of types;
- (iii) The list of types was inserted into another *.xml* file and annotated according to different chronological, morphotactic, and morphosemantic variables.

This process was repeated for both corpora to obtain two separate datasets of types, whose raw and normalised values are reported in Table 1, notice that the numbers include doublets, that is, items that were found in both corpora, for example, *Brexit* and *Grex**it*:

Table 1. Raw/normalised number of CLs and HF_s formed by *-xit* in the ITT and ITr¹³

Corpus	CL/pm _w (%)	HF/pm _w (%)	Total/pm _w (%)
ITT	140/0.0096 (53.23%)	123/0.0085 (47.14%)	263/0.0181 (46.76%)
ITr	172/0.0210 (52.6%)	155/0.0189 (47.4%)	327/0.0400 (55.42%)
Total (%)	311 (52.71%)	279 (47.28%)	590 (100%)

As it could be noted, the *-xit* formations are more frequent in the ITr corpus than in the ITT. This difference may be explained by the more specific textual genre of the ITr corpus. Indeed, the latter consists predominantly of news articles, in which the use of *-xit* words is likely to be favoured. On the contrary, the ITT corpus is a static web corpus, thus it is more heterogeneous from this point of view.

4. Micro-diachronic trend of *-xit* in the ITr

After its first appearance in 2012, *Brexit* was included four years later in *Treccani*'s neological data bank (see note 6). Since then, the large number of CLs and HF_s attested (see Table 1) makes a micro-diachronic examination worthwhile, in order to trace how this “process of language-internal analogical extension” developed over time (Seifart 2015: 511). To explore this issue, the design of the ITr was exploited to analyse the development of the *-xit* pattern during the years 2014-2024. Two variables were particularly suitable for this purpose, namely the number of new types recorded each year and their date of first attestation.

In Figure 2, these variables were used to plot two complementary aspects of productivity: the degree of saturation of the word formation process over time and the distribution of new coinages per year.¹⁴ Both plots clearly point to a sharp increase of *-xit* formations in 2016. In

¹³ In a recent study, Wolfer & Koplenig (2025) show that normalised frequencies are generally reliable in comparisons involving large corpora. Nonetheless, “[f]or smaller corpora in particular, [...] the comparability for less frequent types can quickly decrease” (2025: 20), and even “larger corpora have the same problem in their own lower frequency ranges” (2025: 19). Following this insight from corpus linguistics, in Table 1 normalised frequencies are reported together with raw frequencies. The percentages refer to raw frequency values.

¹⁴ In the left plot, the values adjacent to the data points represent the cumulative number of types in percentage; in the right plot, they represent the number of new *-xit* formations per year. In the latter case, normalised values are used to account for the uneven distribution of documents across years in the ITr corpus, with 2014 and 2015

that year, the new coinages exceeded those of 2015 by more than 25%, reaching a normalised distribution of 0.19, the highest value in the time span considered. Of course, this peak is intimately tied to the related socio-political event of that year, namely the referendum in which 51.9% of British people voted in favour of leaving the European Union. Moreover, since the withdrawal was formally carried out only four years later, it seems not coincidental that the word formation process registers a doubling of new coinages in 2019 and 2020 (46 and 54 types, respectively) compared to 2018 (21 types).¹⁵ By contrast, in the final years of the timeline (2023-2024), there is only a small increase of -exit word formations. Indeed, from 2022 onwards, the cumulative sum of new types increases by only about 3%, while the normalised distribution of new types per year falls to 0.01, the lowest value registered in the time span considered.

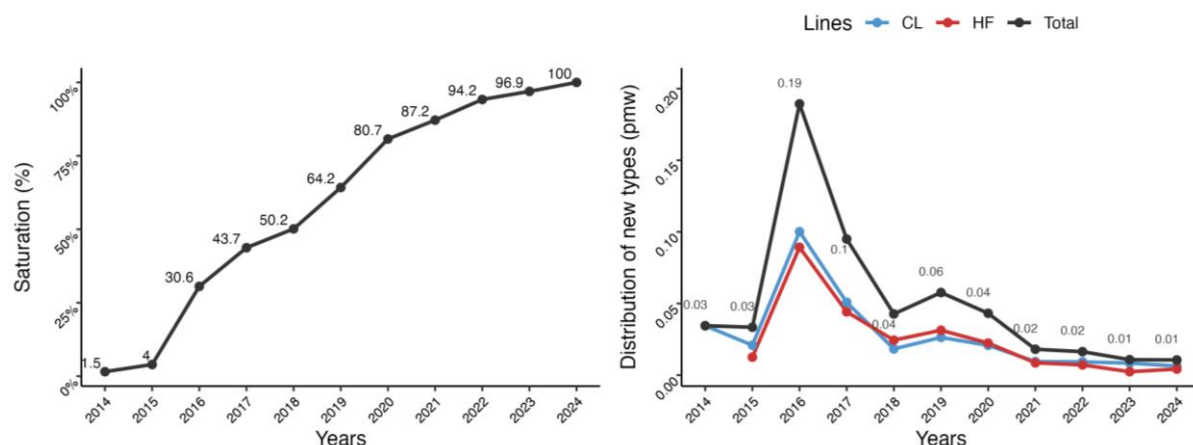


Figure 2. Cumulative distribution and diachronic trend of -exit words in the ITr corpus

As for the distribution of new HF and CLs, the right-hand plot in Figure 2 highlights similar micro-diachronic trends over the time span considered.¹⁶ The first HF is recorded in 2015, one year later than the first CLs, among which we find already in 2014 successful neologisms, such as *Brexit*, *Grex*, and *Nexit* (< *Netherland*). The first HF recorded is: *Crocexit* ‘call for the resignation of Rosario Crocetta’ < (*Rosario*) *Crocetta*; *Iridexit* ‘(hypothetical) decommission of the Iride beach club’ < (*lido*) *Iride* ‘name of a beach club in Sassari’; and *Telexit* ‘the crisis of TV programming’ < *televisione* ‘television’. Interestingly, HF even outnumber CLs in the period 2018-2020. Since the years between 2016 and 2020 represent the most productive phase of -exit in terms of new coinages, with 2016 as its peak, the predominance of HF in the final years of this period may reflect a shift towards an increased use of the -exit pattern in Italian journalese, where it is employed to refer to national and local socio-political events alongside international ones, by analogy with the most salient example of such events, namely *Brexit*.

containing fewer documents than 2020. For more information on the design of the ITr: see <https://www.sketchengine.eu/italian-trends-corpus/> (accessed on 19/03/2026).

¹⁵ Although the number of newly attested types increased in 2020, the normalised distribution of new coinages in the right plot decreases due to the substantial growth of the corpus size in that year, which attenuates the incidence of the value reported.

¹⁶ To test whether there is an association between the two variables (year of occurrence ~ origin), a chi-square test was performed on a contingency table containing the number of new CLs and HF across years during the time span 2014-2024. The results do not indicate a significant association between the two variables ($\chi^2 = 9.606$, $df = 10$, $p = 0.47$), suggesting that the number of new coinages across years is independent of their origin.

However, this does not necessarily entail a consolidation of the *-exit* pattern in Italian. On the contrary, apart from rare highly (token) frequent items such as *Grex* and *Brex*, subsequently followed by the successful HF *Italex* (2016), the category of *-exit* words consists almost exclusively of *hapax* and *dis legomena*, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Hapax* and *dis legomena* among *-exit* words in the ITr

Type	Hapax (%)	Dis (%)
CLs	95 (51.63%)	22 (50%)
HFs	89 (48.36%)	22 (50%)
Total	184 (100%)	44 (100%)

More than 50% of the items are *hapaxes* (184/327; 56.26%). Furthermore, *hapax* and *dis legomena* together cover almost three quarters of the entire dataset (228/327; 69.72%). Such numbers clearly indicate that the *-exit* word formation pattern yields predominantly ephemeral items, since more than half of the items formed by *-exit* are occasional creations; in this respect, there is no significant difference between CLs and HFs. The ephemerality of many items is further confirmed by the median absolute frequency, which is always equal to 1 due to the substantial number of *hapaxes*. Conversely, the mean absolute frequency is influenced by a small number of highly frequent items, mostly CLs: $\bar{x}_{CL}$ 712.73; $\bar{x}_{HF}$ 60.63.

Another relevant aspect concerns the permanence of types during the time span 2014-2024. Figure 3 shows the number of years in which each *-exit* word is attested in the ITr. As already mentioned, nearly three quarters of the dataset (244/327 items; 74.6%) do not “remain” at all, disappearing after one year and revealing once again that this kind of word formation is mostly transient in nature. In this respect, there is no substantial difference between CLs (123/244) and HFs (121/244), e.g. *BRIexit* ‘withdrawal from the Belt and Road Initiative’ (< *Belt and Road Initiative*); *Insalex* ‘(hypothetical) dismissal of bagged salads’ (< *insalata* ‘salad’). In addition, 66/327 items (20.18%) are attested over a span of 2-4 years, and may be considered moderately ephemeral. Even in this case, we find balance between HFs (31/66; 46.96%) and CLs (35/66; 53.03%), e.g. *Monrealex* ‘secession of near-villages from the municipality of Monreale’ (< ?*Monreale* / ?*monrealese*); *coal-exit* ‘decommission of coal as a polluting source of energy’ (< *coal*). As mentioned before, the relevant difference between HFs and CLs concerns the most frequent items. Among the few forms attested for 5 or more years, 14/17 (82.35%) are CLs, for example, *Polexit* ‘(hypothetical) withdrawal of Poland from EU’, which is attested for 9 years. By contrast, only 3/17 (17.64%) are HFs: *Italex*, *Italiexit*, *Italiaexit* ‘hypothetical withdrawal of Italy from EU’, three forms with a slightly different degree of retention of the first constituent.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Polexit* and *Italex* became names of extreme right-wing political parties as well. In both cases, it is impossible (and maybe also irrelevant) to understand whether the first constituent is an ethnic or a toponym. Due to the occurrence of alternative forms, such as *Polaexit*, *Polandexit* and *Polonexit* (a HF), it seems plausible to assume that the toponym is more salient for speakers. However, in some cases, it is impossible to decide. Furthermore, sometimes it is hard to say with certainty in which language CLs were formed, as only HFs were meticulously cross-checked in parallel language corpora, such as *English Trends*. In the case of *Polexit*, it seems that the original word formation comes from English. However, this point does not seem to be crucial since, the pattern becoming clear enough in one language means that, whether *Pol-* comes from *Poland* (or *Polish*?) or from *Polska* (or *polski*?) could vary from speaker to speaker.

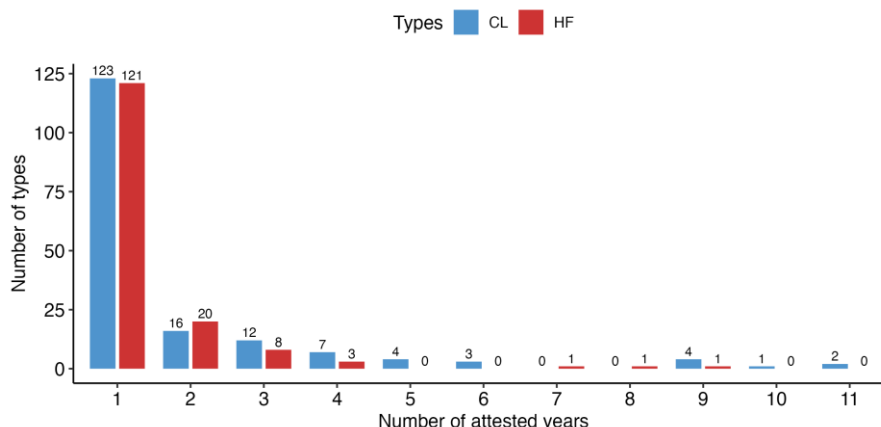


Figure 3. Distribution of -exit types according to occurrence(s) per year

4.1 The syllabic length and the shape of formative in -exit words

In this section, the morphotactic features of the -exit words attested in the ITT and the ITr are examined. It should be noted that, except for the most frequent items and a limited number of neologisms, the IPA transcripts of the phonetic realisation of -exit words are not available. For this reason, the following analysis is primarily based on orthographic evidence.

A particularly relevant aspect of the -exit word formation process concerns the shape of its constituents. As already mentioned, this morphological pattern emerged at first from the need to shorten a longer noun phrase, fulfilling an economic motivation or a “compacting function”, i.e. *Grexit* < *Greek Euro Area Exit* (Renner 2020: 9). In this respect, the types in (4a-e) preserve the original right-headed structure, while presenting prosodic and morphotactic differences in the shape of its formants:¹⁸

- (4) a. *campetto-exit* ‘dismantlement of the playground’ < *campetto* ‘playground’
- b. *Armanexit* ‘abandonment of Milan by Giorgio Armani’ < (*Giorgio*) *Armani*
- c. *Renxit* ‘withdrawal of support for Matteo Renzi’ < (*Matteo*) *Renzi*
- d. *Balo-exit* ‘sale of the football player Mario Balotelli’ < (*Mario*) *Balotelli*
- e. *PD-exit* ‘abandonment of the Democratic Party’ < *PD* ‘Democratic Party’

Notably, the prosodic output of the examples in (4a-e) does not always correspond to the original disyllabic model imposed by *Grexit* and *Brexit*. Instead, we find variation between three (4b), four (4b-d-e), and five syllables (4a). In terms of morphotactic features of the examples, while (4c) can still be analysed as in the domain of blending, in other cases -(e)xit is attached to different types of morphological units, exhibiting thus a more affix-like behaviour (Bauer *et al.* 2019: 61-63). In particular, the left-hand constituent may correspond to: a full word in (4a); a root in (4b);¹⁹ a splinter in (4c); a clipping in (4d);²⁰ an initialism in (4e). Even

¹⁸ The extended form of the initialism *PD* is *Partito Democratico*.

¹⁹ Even if the term “lexical root” applied to a proper noun may look theoretically problematic, the position of the split and its frequency in the sample (see Table 6) point to the same preference for roots (and stems) as bases in Italian word formation and inflection (Dressler & Thornton 1991). Moreover, as Cutler (1981) observes, “[t]he acceptability of neologisms [...] depends crucially on the ease with which their base word can be recognized within them” (Cutler 1981: 76-77).

²⁰ In this study, the distinction between clippings and splinters is primarily based on their different morphosyntactic status. Clippings are truncated words that typically retain the denotation of the full form, although their connotation

the shape of the “morphemised splinter” *-(e)xit* (Lalić-Krstin & Silaški 2019: 228) may occur either in its full form (4a-b-d-e) or in the reduced variant *-xit* (4c).

In Table 3, the number of syllables of the *-exit* words gathered from the ITT and the ITr is reported.²¹

Table 3. Syllabic distributions of *-exit* words in the ITr and the ITT

σ	Examples	ITr (%)	ITT (%)
2	<i>Bayxit</i>	77 (23.91%)	74 (28.46%)
3	<i>Vinexit</i>	105 (32.6%)	97 (37.3%)
4	<i>Corbynexit</i>	111 (34.47%)	70 (26.92%)
5	<i>Mezzogiornexit</i>	26 (8.07%)	14 (5.38%)
6	<i>Agroinvest-exit</i>	3 (0.93%)	3 (1.15%)
7	<i>San Giovanni in Fiorexit</i>	0 (0%)	2 (0.77%)
Total		322 (100%)	260 (100%)

Although the two samples were collected from corpora of different sizes, both distributions are comparable. In fact, both show clusters of values around 2-4 syllables, and both are centred around 3 syllables, with similar dispersion.²² The only differences in the ITT corpus involve fewer trisyllabic types and the attestation of items with 7 syllables., e.g. *cooperativExit* ‘end of participation in the cooperative compliance regime’ < *cooperative (compliance)*.²³ Table 4 shows how the CLs and HFs differ from each other in relation to the same variable (syllabic length).

Table 4. Syllabic distributions of CLs and HFs in the ITr and the ITT

σ	Examples	ITr		ITT	
		CL (%)	HF (%)	CL (%)	HF (%)
2	<i>Bayxit</i>	61 (36.3%)	16 (10.38%)	58 (41.42%)	16 (13.3%)
3	<i>Vinexit</i>	63 (37.5%)	42 (27.27%)	53 (37.85%)	44 (36.6%)
4	<i>Corbynexit</i>	38 (22.61%)	73 (47.4%)	24 (17.14%)	46 (38.3%)
5	<i>Mezzogiornexit</i>	6 (3.57%)	20 (13%)	5 (3.57%)	9 (7.5%)
6	<i>Agroinvest-exit</i>	0 (0%)	3 (1.94%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.5%)
7	<i>San Giovanni in Fiorexit</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.6%)
Total		168 (100%)	154 (100%)	140 (100%)	120 (100%)

may shift, e.g. *Balo* < (*Mario*) *Balotelli* in (4d). By contrast, splinters are bound, usually submorphemic elements involved in blending, and generally lack word status. More specifically, they consist of phonetically reduced forms of one or more lexical units, e.g. *Ren-* < (*Matteo*) *Renzi* and *-xit* < *exit* in (4c) (Adams 1973: 149-150). Although *-exit* formally corresponds to a full word in many cases, it also occurs as a splinter, i.e. *-xit* (see note 3).

²¹ Note that in eight cases the number of syllables was not annotated for the dubious pronunciation of the item, e.g. *Fdl-exit* ‘opting out from regional elections in Calabria by Fratelli d’Italia’ < *Fdl* (< *Fratelli d’Italia* ‘name of a right-wing Italian political party’).

²² ITr: $\bar{x}_\sigma$ 3.3, M_σ 3, SD_σ 0.95. ITT: $\bar{x}_\sigma$ 3.15, M_σ 3, SD_σ 0.98.

²³ This item was considered a HF, although it falls out of the definition given in Section 2. However, it must be noted that *cooperativExit* was not found in any parallel English corpora. This item seems to be an occasionalism used in the juridical language variety of Italian: <https://loconteandpartners.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/II-Quotidiano-Ipsa-del-08.10.16.pdf> (accessed on 06/04/2026).

In Table 4, the difference in syllabic length between CLs and HFs emerges quite clearly from the reported percentages. In particular, CLs tend to cluster around 2 and 3 syllables, whereas HFs are more centred around 3 and 4 syllables, e.g. *Zuxit* ‘protest against the automated censorship operated by Facebook’ (< *Mark Zuckerberg*) (ITT) vs. *Melonexit* ‘reject of the European and constitutional principles by Giorgia Meloni’ (< *Giorgia Meloni*) (ITr), and this tendency is also corroborated by descriptive statistics²⁴. Moreover, compared to CLs, HFs seem to allow both shorter and longer prosodic structures. For instance, HFs reach an output of 6 syllables, or even 7 in the ITT sample, whereas CLs never adopt longer prosodic outputs, e.g. *Secondiglianexit* ‘(hypothetical) secession of Secondigliano from Naples’ municipality’ < *Secondigliano*, *San Giovanni in Fiorexit* ‘(hypothetical) secession of San Giovanni in Fiore from Cosenza’s municipality’ < *San Giovanni in Fiore*. Overall, the syllabic structure of CLs and HFs represents one relevant point of divergence between the two categories.

The final feature to be examined is the shape of the formatives (full words, morphs, splinters, clippings, initials) in the two samples of -exit words (for a similar analysis, see Bauer *et al.* 2019: 61-63). The global values are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of formatives for the -exit types in the ITr and ITT

Constituent	Formatives	ITr (%)	ITT (%)	Example	Referent
left	full word	56 (17.1%)	40 (15.2%)	<i>Islamexit</i>	<i>Islam</i>
	root	90 (27.52)	70 (26.61%)	<i>Atalantexit</i>	<i>Atalanta</i>
	splinter	136 (41.6%)	114 (43.34%)	<i>Jolexit</i>	<i>Jolanda di Savoia</i>
	clipping	10 (3%)	5 (1.9%)	<i>Demexit</i>	<i>Democrats</i>
	initialism	21 (6.42%)	21 (8%)	<i>Ehxit</i>	<i>Euskal Herria</i>
	unclear	14 (4.28%)	13 (4.94%)	<i>Frontexit</i>	<i>Frontex</i>
	Total	327 (100%)	263 (100%)		
right	-exit	277 (84.7%)	207 (78.7%)	<i>Benettexit</i>	<i>Benetton</i>
	-xit	43 (13.15%)	48 (18.25%)	<i>Bielxit</i>	<i>Marcelo Bielsa</i>
	unclear	7 (2.15%)	8 (3.04%)	<i>Texit</i>	<i>Texas</i>
	Total	327 (100%)	263 (100%)		

Despite the different number of observations, there are no substantial differences. The two samples are coherent in terms of morphotactic segmentation, and even if the samples were collected from two different corpora, the difference between percentages remain relatively small, generally below 5 percentage points. By and large, the left-constituent is preferably retained as a splinter, although there is a certain degree of variation, since lexical roots and full words also occur with decreasing frequency. On the contrary, clippings appear to be less salient formatives. The right constituent tends to be -exit in most cases, whereas -xit is used less frequently. The variation in the shape of the left-hand constituent may reflect the fact that the -exit word formation process is still emerging in Contemporary Italian. On the other hand, even if analogy grasps much more than the mere shape of the items, it is evident that many do not follow the *Brexit*-model at all, being substantially longer and formed from meaningful morphological elements, such as words and lexical roots. At this point, it can be interesting to distinguish once again between CLs and HFs:

²⁴ ITr: $\bar{x}_\sigma$ 2.93, M_σ 3, SD_σ 0.85 (CLs) vs. $\bar{x}_\sigma$ 3.69, M_σ 4, SD_σ 0.89 (HF). ITT: $\bar{x}_\sigma$ 2.83, M_σ 3, SD_σ 0.83 (CLs) vs. $\bar{x}_\sigma$ 3.54, M_σ 3.5, SD_σ 1.01.

Table 6. Distribution of formatives for the CLs and HFs in the ITr and ITT

Constituent	Formatives	ITr		ITT	
		CL (%)	HF (%)	CL (%)	HF (%)
left	full word	33 (19.18%)	23 (14.83%)	22 (15.71%)	18 (14.63%)
	root	25 (14.53%)	65 (41.93%)	19 (13.57%)	51 (41.46%)
	splinter	86 (50%)	50 (32.25%)	75 (53.57%)	39 (31.7%)
	clipping	8 (4.65%)	2 (1.3%)	4 (2.85%)	1 (0.81%)
	initialism	11 (6.4%)	10 (6.45%)	10 (7.14%)	11 (8.94%)
	unclear	9 (5.23%)	5 (3.22%)	10 (7.14%)	3 (2.44%)
	Total	172 (100%)	155 (100%)	140 (100%)	123 (100%)
right	<i>-exit</i>	128 (74.41%)	149 (96.12%)	97 (69.28%)	110 (89.43%)
	<i>-xit</i>	38 (22.1%)	5 (3.22%)	37 (26.42%)	11 (8.94%)
	unclear	6 (3.48)	1 (0.65%)	6 (4.28%)	2 (1.62%)
	Total	172 (100%)	155 (100%)	140 (100%)	123 (100%)

In Table 6, the formatives involved in both categories (i.e. CLs and HFs) yield quite homogeneous values. More importantly, Table 6 highlights the important differences between the categories of CLs and HFs. In particular, the left-constituent of HFs is selected preferably among the lexical roots, whereas CLs show a preference for splinters. At the same time, CLs may present also a left-hand constituent corresponding either to a full word or to a lexical root; in turn, HFs may also involve splinters and full words. For both categories, the occurrence of clippings as formative elements is a marginal tendency. Turning to the right constituent, another relevant divergence lies in the selection of the splinter *-xit*, which seems to be a highly dispreferred variant for HFs. This fact could also depend on the shape of the preceding element or on other prosodic constraints, for instance, the tendency to assume the same syllabic length of the leader word *Brexit*, which, as we have already seen, is not common for HFs. In fact, among the 43 occurrences of *-xit* in the ITr, in 35 cases (81.4%) the *-exit* word is disyllabic. Similarly, in the ITT, among the 48 occurrences of *-xit*, 39 items (81.25%) are disyllabic. Since, as already observed before, CLs tend to prefer disyllabic outputs (see Table 4), it is not surprising that the splinter *-xit* appears almost exclusively in this category of *-exit* words.

5. Conclusions

In this study, the lexical innovations formed by the productive splinter *-(e)xit* were analysed, with particular reference to their micro-diachronic trend and to their peculiar morphotactic shape. The diachronic trend of *-exit* highlights its emerging nature, yielding many *hapax* and *dis legomena*, ups and downs that could be considered a symptom of its newness in the morphological system of Contemporary Italian. At the same time, the international outbreak of *Brexit* has had its impact, leading to the formation of new types and to an increasing combination of the borrowed formative *-exit* with native elements, mostly proper nouns. The micro-diachronic trend highlighted no notable difference between the distribution of CLs and HFs formed by *-exit* (see Figures 3-4) in the ITr, except for the higher number of frequent and resistant CLs recorded. Conversely, the Anglo-Italian HFs present few forms that are frequent enough in terms of tokens and recurrent enough to persist after one or two years. Taking into account the morphotactic shape of the *-exit* words, it has been established that, in spite of the model yielded by the leader word *Brexit* (i.e. reduction to a complex onset of the left-hand constituent, disyllabic length), both samples display notable variation: many types exhibit longer syllabic structures (3-4 syllable); the left-constituent is often reduced to a splinter, but it can be also preserved fully or retain the entire lexical stem. Again, this behaviour is in line with

the distinction between CL and HF. Indeed, HFs are on average 1 syllable longer than CLs, which in turn either prefer to adopt a disyllabic output or a trisyllabic one. Furthermore, whereas CLs select a splinter and the reduced splinter *-xit* more often, HFs tend to retain the lexical root of the left-constituent and to fully preserve the *-exit* component. What can be inferred from those observations? Our hypothesis is that after the success of *Brexit*, an *-exit* word formation pattern was indeed extracted and extended on native stems (Gardani 2021). However, since such pattern was firmly anchored in socio-political events that have by this point in time already passed, it is difficult to establish whether it will remain or disappear in the future. Nonetheless, its impact on the morphological system of Italian is interesting to analyse, since it sheds light on how the speakers tried to accommodate it, preferring longer forms over shorter ones, and lexical stems over splinters. So, in the end, we are left with a question of whether this morphotactic behaviour shown by HFs could have been caused by system-dependent morphological naturalness (Dressler *et al.* 1987).

Acknowledgements

The attendance at the 14th edition of the Mediterranean Morphology Meeting was made possible by funding provided through the Young Researcher and Innovator Conference Grant of the ENEOLI COST Action (CA22126 – European Network on Lexical Innovation). I would like to thank the organisers and participants of the conference. I would like to express my gratitude to all the editors of the volume, especially Frane Malenica (University of Zadar), whose careful reading and valuable feedback have helped to improve the quality of this work.

References

- Adams, Valerie. 1973. *An Introduction to Modern English Word-Formation*. London, New York: Longman.
- Antonelli, Giuseppe. 2016. *L'italiano nella società della comunicazione 2.0*. 2nd edn. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Bauer, Laurie & Beliaeva, Natalia & Tarasova, Elizaveta. 2019. Recalibrating productivity: Factors involved. *Zeitschrift für Wortbildung / Journal of Word Formation* 3(1). 44–80.
- Berman, J. M. 1961. Contribution on Blending. *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 9. 278–281.
- Brasolin, Paolo & Franzini, Greta E. & Spina, Stefania. 2023. “Ti blocco perché sei un trollazzo”. Lexical Innovation in Contemporary Italian in a Large Twitter Corpus. In Boschetti, Federico, Lebani, Gianluca E., Magnini, Bernardo & Novielli, Nicole (eds.), *Proceedings of the Ninth Italian Conference on Computational Linguistics (CLiC-it 2023)*, 100–112. Venice: CEUR Workshop Proceedings.
- Buchstaller, Isabelle, Rickford, John R., Traugott, Elizabeth Closs, Wasow, Thomas & Zwicky, Arnold. 2010. The sociolinguistics of a short-lived innovation: Tracing the development of quotative all across spoken and internet newsgroup data. *Language Variation and Change* 22. 191–219.
- Caffarelli, Enzo. 2018. Brexit, Grexit, Frexit, Prexit, Crexit, Catalexit et sim. *Rivista Italiana di Onomastica* 21(2). 447–448.
- Cortelazzo, Michele A. 1988. Italienisch: Fachsprachen: Lingue speciali. In Holtus, Günter, Metzeltin, Michael & Schmitt, Christian (eds.), *Lexikon der Romanistischen Linguistik*, vol. 4, 246–255. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Cutler, Anne. 1981. Degrees of transparency in word formation. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics / Revue canadienne de linguistique* 26(1). 73–77.
- D’Achille, Paolo. 2003. *L’italiano contemporaneo*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- De Mauro, Tullio. 2016. *Storia linguistica dell’Italia repubblicana dal 1946 ai nostri giorni*. Roma, Bari: Laterza.
- Dressler, Wolfgang Ulrich, Mayerthaler, Willi, Panagl, Oswald & Wurzel, Wolfgang Ullrich. 1987. *Leitmotifs in Natural Morphology*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

- Dressler, Wolfgang Ulrich & Thornton, Anna Maria 1991. Doppie basi e binarismo nella morfologia italiana. *Rivista di Linguistica* 3(1). 3–22.
- Fradin, Bernard. 2015. Blending. In Müller, Peter O., Ohnheiser, Ingeborg, Olsen, Susan & Rainer, Franz (eds.), *Word-Formation. An International Handbook of the language of Europe*, vol. 1, 386–413. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Gardani, Francesco. 2021. On how morphology spreads. *Word Structure* 14(2). 129–147.
- Grieve, Jack & Nini, Andrea & Guo, Diansheng. 2016. Analyzing lexical emergence in Modern American English online. *English Language & Linguistics* 21. 99–127.
- Herman, Ondřej, Jakubíček, Miloš, Kraus, Jan & Suchomel, Vít. 2025. From Word of the Year to Word of the Week: Daily-updated Monitor Corpora for 25 Languages. In Kosem, Iztok, Jakubíček, Miloš, Medved', Marek, Zgaga, Karolina, Arhar Holdt, Špela, Munda, Tina & Salgado, Ana (eds.), *Proceedings of the eLex 2025. Brno, Czech Republic: Lexical Computing*, 44–61. Brno: Lexical Computing.
- Jakubíček, Miloš, Kilgarrieff, Adam, Kovář, Vojtěch, Rychlý, Pavel & Suchomel, Vít. 2013. The TenTen corpus family. In Hardie, Andrew & Love, Robbie (eds.), *7th International Corpus Linguistics Conference CL*, 125–127. Lancaster: UCREL.
- Kilgarrieff, Adam, Baisa, Vít, Bušta, Jan, Jakubíček, Miloš, Vojtěch, Kovář, Michelfeit, Jan, Rychlý, Pavel & Suchomel, Vít. 2014. The Sketch Engine: ten years on. *Lexicography* 1. 7–36.
- Lalić-Krstin, Gordana & Silaški, Nadežda. 2019. 'Don't go brexin' my heart': The ludic aspects of Brexit-induced neologisms. In Koller, Veronika, Kopf, Susanne & Miglbauer, Marlene (eds.), *Discourses of Brexit*, 222–236. London: Routledge.
- Lasserre, Marine & Montermini, Fabio. 2014. How is the meaning of complex lexemes constructed? A study of neoclassical compounds in *-cratie* / *-crate* and *-logie* / *-logue*. *Rivista di Linguistica* 26(2). 157–181.
- Lepschy, Anna Laura & Lepschy, Giulio. 2019. *La lingua italiana. Storia. Varietà dell'uso. Grammatica*. 6th edn. Firenze, Milano: Bompiani.
- Marello, Carla. 2020. New words and new forms of linguistic purism in the 21st century: The Italian debate. *International Journal of Lexicography* 33(2). 168–186.
- Massicotte, Philippe & South, Andy. 2026. *rnaturalearth: World Map Data from Natural Earth*. R package version 1.2.0. URL: <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=rnaturalearth>.
- Mattiello, Elisa. 2018. Paradigmatic Morphology. Splinters, Combining Forms, and Secreted Affixes. *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics* 15(1). 2–22.
- Montermini, Fabio. 2018. Les affixes dérivationnels ont-ils des allomorphes? Pour une modélisation de la variation des exposants dans une morphologie à contraintes. In Bonami, Olivier, Boyé, Gilles, Dal, Georgette, Giraudo, Hélène & Namer, Fiammetta (eds.), *The lexeme in descriptive and theoretical morphology*, 423–465. Berlin: Language Science Press.
- Pebesma, Edzer. 2018. Simple Features for R: Standardized Support for Spatial Vector Data. *The R Journal* 10(1). 439–446. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32614/RJ-2018-009>.
- Pedersen, Thomas Lin. 2024. *patchwork: The Composer of Plots*. R package version 1.3.0. URL: <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=patchwork>.
- Rainer, Franz. 2013. Formación de palabras y analogía. Aspectos diacrónicos. In Pujol Payet, Isabel (ed.), *Formación de palabras y diacronía*, 141–172. A Coruña: Universidade da Coruña, Servizo de Publicacións.
- R Core Team. 2022. *R: A language and environment for statistical computing*. Vienna: R Foundation for Statistical Computing. URL: <https://www.R-project.org/>.
- Renner, Vincent. 2020. An ecosystem view of English word-formation. *The Mental Lexicon* 15(1). 4–20.
- Ronneberger-Sibold, Elke. 2006. Lexical Blends: Functionally Tuning the Transparency of Complex Words. *Folia Linguistica* 40(1/2). 155–181.
- Sayers, David. 2014. The Mediated Innovation Model: A Framework for Researching Media Influence in Language Change. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 18(2). 185–212.
- Seifart, Frank. 2015. Direct and indirect affix borrowing. *Language* 91(3). 511–532.
- Thornton, Anna Maria. 2016. *Il genere di Brexit*. (<https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/il-genere-di-brexit/1097>) (Accessed 2025-01-16).

- Trampuš, Mitja & Novak, Blaž. 2012. Internals of an aggregated web news feed. *Proceedings of the Fifteenth International Information Science Conference IS SiKDD 2012*. 431–434.
- Wickham, Hadley. 2016. *ggplot2: Elegant Graphics for Data Analysis*. New York: Springer.
- Wickham, Hadley, François, Romain, Henry, Lionel, Müller, Kirill & Vaughan, Davis. 2023. *dplyr: A Grammar of Data Manipulation*. R package version 1.1.3. URL: <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=dplyr>.
- Wolfer, Sascha & Koplenig, Alexander. 2025. Does corpus size influence normalised frequencies? *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory*. Ahead of Publication. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/cllt-2024-0040>