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From wordplay to exclusion: Blends and related word-formation processes in Italian politics and giornalese

Abstract: This study offers a qualitative analysis of lexical blends and nominals formed with combining forms in Italian politics and giornalese. Besides (re-)naming and designating (new) concepts, they are intended to attract attention, to express stance, and for a number of socio-pragmatic effects. Whereas the choice of constituent names and nouns depends on description, complex names and nouns are created with careful attention to the semantics and formal make-up of the constituents. Our research question, therefore, is one about the relation between underlying semantic motivation (Benczes 2006; Panther and Radden 2011), phonological motivation (Ronneberger-Sibold 2010) and socio-pragmatic effects (Colston 2015, 2017). Overall, the findings suggest a strong preference for highly context-dependent word formations that express negativity towards the target, with third-party orientation. Whereas negative evaluatives need not be ironic, they can realize irony and humor in context. For instance, *Aledanno* ‘Alemanno the Damage Maker; Alemanno’s political mismanagement of Rome’ must be computed as ‘Alemanno is not (that) bad (after all)’ in the context of comparison with and criticism of another Mayor of Rome, Virginia Raggi. Negative evaluation involves out-group exclusion and disalignment, as the out-group’s values, actions and beliefs that are accessed through the referent are challenged, ridiculed and attacked in various ways. The other way round, negative evaluation can contribute to ingratiation, enhance complicity and work towards associative affiliation, agreement and alignment with shared values within the particular community – i.e. it is a reliable form of inclusion of like-minded addressees. Wordplay serves as a form of ingratiation, has humorous effects, and makes extensive use of paronymy (e.g. *Bertolesso*, where humor modulates negativity). Homonymy pushes the boundaries of wordplay that giornalese permits. E.g. *Alfetta* – a nickname for the coalition government formed by *Angelino Alfano* and *Enrico Letta* – mimics the name of a famous Italian sports car.

Keywords: exclusion, Italian, giornalese, lexical blends, politics, wordplay

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1 Introduction

The present paper provides a primarily qualitative investigation into the semantics and socio-pragmatic effects of 250 items that have been used in Italian political discourse and are mediated through the press and other online information outlets.¹ They are naming and appellative (van Langendonck 2008) blends (Gries 2012; Mattiello 2013) and complex words that are formed with secreted elements (Fradin 2000; section 2.1.3) and combining forms, e.g. (1)–(2) and (3)–(4), respectively.

- (1) *Berluscotti*.N_{PR} /ber.lu'skɔt.ti/ (1998) < (*Silvio*) *Berlusco(n)l*.N_{PR} /ber.lu'sko.ni/ + (*Fausto*) *Ber(tin)otti*.N_{PR} /ber.ti'nɔt.ti/, i.e. Bertinotti's (unwitting) support of Berlusconi's opposition coalition parties in successfully overthrowing the then ruling government (of which Bertinotti's Communist party is the smallest party) and forming a new ruling coalition that excludes Bertinotti
- (2) *accogliene*.N /ak.kɔʎ'ʎo.ne/ (2016) < *accogli(enza)*.N /ak.kɔʎ'ʎen.tsa/ 'immigration policy' x *cogliene*.N /kɔʎ'ʎo.ne/ 'asshole', i.e. pro-immigration assholes, or Democrats and Democratic leaners that are overly favourable to immigration policies
- (3) *Berlusconistan*.N_{PR} (2009) < EN *Berlusconistan*.N_{PR} (< (*Silvio*) *Berlusconi*.N_{PR} + *-stan*.COMB.FORM, i.e. the (non-fictional) Republic of Italy, run by Prime Minister Berlusconi; Berlusconi's decadent world, characterized by low moral standards and mainly interested in pleasure
- (4) *Tangentopoli*.N_{PR1} (1992) < *tangent(e)*.N 'bribe' + (*Mon*)*opoli*.N_{PR} 'Monopoly' / *-(o)poli*.COMB.FORM 'town', i.e. Milan, City of Bribery
tangentopoli.N (1992) < *tangent(e)*.N 'bribe' + *-(o)poli*.COMB.FORM 'scandal related to N₁', political corruption; any kind of widespread political corruption

The focus on politics, media language and journalese – which are in constant need of new naming devices – enables us to concentrate on linguistic creativity, which is a distinctive feature of news discourse. Indeed, journalists – and, we may want

1 The present research was carried out within COST-Action CA22126 – European Network On Lexical Innovation (ENEOLI) 2023–2027. Whereas both authors conceived and designed the study, Silvia Cacchiani is responsible for sections 2 and 4, and Mauro Le Donne for section 3 and for providing all phonetic transcriptions. Sections 1 and 5 were jointly written. A special thank goes to the participants in the Workshop “Wordplay and Exclusion” (30–31 May 2025, JMU Würzburg / online) and to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback and suggestions. Without them, this paper would have been different. Needless to say, any mistakes and shortcomings remain our own.

to add, online news writers and commentators – exploit lexical innovations to achieve certain stylistic effects or to convey a sense of irony and humor (Renouf 2007: 70), to catch the readers / users' attention and to engage them in reading the article to the end (Hohenhaus 2007: 23). In the light of this, we assume that word-play (Zirker and Winter-Froemel 2015) and humor – a socio-pragmatic effect of figurative tropes such as irony (Colston 2015, 2017) – cut across the language of politics as mediated through journalese in different ways. However, the main emphasis in this paper lies in assessing to what extent the semantico-encyclopaedic features of constituents within the composite structure impinge on the ability of individual word formations to deliberately express aggression – including negative types of verbal irony (e.g. sarcasm; cf. Attardo 2000, 2020) – to achieve third-party exclusion, with socio-pragmatic effects (Colston 2015) such as the expression of negativity, and primarily disagreement and derision towards the target. One related question is whether or not we can identify any form-meaning pairings in word-formation patterns or schemas (Booij 2010) that are readily used to express negativity, also negative irony.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 concentrates on the theoretical underpinnings. Specifically, we offer working definitions for lexical blends and nominals that are formed with combining forms in section 2.1. For the semantics of word formations, in section 2.2 we briefly present notions that we adapt from research in Cognitive Linguistics – particularly, Benczes's (2006) integrated approach to *creative compounding* in English – with special attention to conceptual metaphor and metonymy. Section 2.3. discusses socio-pragmatic effects, irony and humor. Section 3 describes our data pool and methodology of analysis. In section 4, we carry out a qualitative investigation into a restricted set of lexemes with evaluatively neutral semantics, which convey negative evaluations, and which create negative irony. The reflection on orthographic / phonological and morphosyntactic structure is only partial and is made secondary to the greatest interest of *semantic motivation*, as the factor that provides plausible explanation for linguistic structure (Panther and Radden 2011). This enables us to give semantico-encyclopaedic meaning descriptions of the word formation and focus on the ability of individual lexemes to realize socio-pragmatic effects such as expressing negativity and aggression in context, for out-group exclusion and, conversely, in-group inclusion (see also Lalić-Krstin and Silaški, this volume; Liu, this volume).

2 Theoretical underpinnings

This section takes a broadly functional-cognitive perspective into blends and compounds that are used as appellative nouns and proper names in Italian politics and journalese. While forming non-discrete categories, proper names (N_{PR}) are prototypically identifying / referential; they have an indexical as part of their meaning and are used for direct reference (*This is John*; **This is the John*) (Anderson 2007; van Langendonck 2007). Appellative nouns are prototypically descriptive and do not identify unique referents when used as arguments in predications, e.g. *associate* in *Hillary Clinton was an associate at Rose Law Firm*. Over time proper names may undergo de-semanticization and lose memory of their original descriptive meanings, but they retain their original identifying function (e.g. the family name *Baker* does no longer denote an occupation; van Langendonck 2007: 83). In general, proper names do not need to have a descriptive meaning to them, due to de-semanticization or because they were created for their seemingly nice sound (e.g. *Tyrus* < *Tyr(one)* < (*C*)*irus*). Yet, in journalese and in politics the choice of a proper name as constituent of complex words is determined by its descriptive properties, and the new word is created with careful attention to the semantics of both constituents.

Our data can be studied with reference to degrees and types of linguistic *creativity* – from unpredictable phonetic realization and deliberate play with sound shapes (Ronneberger-Sibold 2010: *phonological motivation*), to the (sum of) metaphorical and metonymic operations on various parts of the composite structure (Benczes 2006) and *semantic motivation* in general (Panther and Radden 2011). Whereas we discuss diverse aspects of wordplay and humor as we go along, section 2.1 offers working definitions for the word-formation processes at hand. For the semantics of word-formation, section 2.2 introduces identifying and appellative nouns (van Langendonck 2007) and adapts selected notions from studies of compounding, primarily within Cognitive Linguistics. Section 2.3 turns to the potential socio-pragmatic effects that the data may exhibit, with a view to irony.

2.1 Blends, patterns and schemas

2.1.1 Parole macedonia

The term associated with lexical blends in Italian morphology is *parole macedonia* (lit. ‘fruit-salad words’; cf. Thornton 1993, 2004a, 2004b, based on Migliorini 1949) –

a radial category and a cluster of phenomena that exhibit family resemblance (Brdar-Szabó and Brdar 2008), with a preference for combining source word beginnings in *complex clippings* (*catto-dem.N* (2006) < *catto(lico).N* ‘Catholic’ + *dem(ocratico).N* ‘Democrat’, i.e. a Catholic Democrat) and less prototypical blends that combine *sw*₁ beginning and a fully represented *sw*₂, e.g. the classifying nouns *Italexit* (5), a case of play with grammar, and *cattocomunista* (6), as well as proper name *Berlusvalter*² (7) and the negative evaluative *accoglione* (2). These are *semi-complete blends*, with position-based stress assignment.

- (5) *Italexit.N* /ita'leksit/ ‘Italeave’ (2016) < *Ital(ia).N_{PR}* /i'talja/ ‘Italy’ + *(Br)exit.N_{PR}* /breksit/, i.e. the possibility of Italy leaving the EU, similar to the U.K.’s Brexit; the Five Stars Movement expressed sentiment for leaving
- (6) *cattocomunista.N* /kat.to.ko.mu'ni.sta/ (1979) < *catto(lico).N* /kat'to.li.ko/ ‘Catholic’ | *catto-.COMB.FORM* + *comunista.N* /ko.mu'ni.sta/ ‘Communist’, i.e. a Communist that is Catholic
- (7) *Berlusvalter.N_{PR}* /ber.lu'zval.ter/ (2008) < *(Silvio) Berlusconi.N_{PR}* /ber.lu'sko.ni/ + *Valter /val.ter/* < *Walter (Veltroni).N_{PR}*, i.e. impossible dialogue between and unrealistic coalition of the right-wing Forza Italia party, led by Berlusconi, and the Democrats, led by Walter Veltroni

2.1.2 Wordplay and creative techniques

Lexical blends represent an important part of *wordplay* (Renner 2015: 119; Sablayrolles 2015), which we understand here as “playfully question[ing] the functioning of language and mak[ing] creative use of its limits” (Zirker and Winter-Froemel 2015: 6). The playful, ludic dimension of wordplay is rooted in language competence – the addresser’s delight in deliberately and *cleverly* manipulating form-meaning relations and playing with sound shapes is equalled by the addressee’s delight in successfully decoding signs and searching for (hidden) meaning(s).

More specifically, lexical blends are non-concatenative word formations formed in extragrammatical, non-rule based morphology (Dressler 2000; Ronneberger-Sibold 2010; Mattiello 2013) using different *creative techniques* – i.e. operations that are grounded in phonological motivation (Ronneberger-Sibold 2010). They are:

² This is hardly surprising, considering that Italian favors derivation over compounding, while lexical blending displays a positive correlation with compounding and clipping (Brdar-Szabó and Brdar 2008).

[a]n intentional fusion [...] of typically two (but potentially more) words where a part [*splinter*; (Adams 1973)] of a first source word (sw_1) – usually this part includes the beginning of sw_1 – is combined with a part [*splinter*] of a second source word (sw_2) – usually this part includes the end of sw_2 – where at least one source word is shortened and / or the fusion may involve overlap of sw_1 and sw_2 at the switchpoint [(Bauer 2012: crossover point)] (Gries 2012: 146).³

In terms of the morphological constituency of morphs, individual blends may vary on the gradable semiotic parameter of morphotactic transparency (Ronneberger-Sibold 2006, 2010; Mattiello 2013; Cacchiani 2011, 2016). At the upper end of the transparency continuum, *complete blends* (Ronneberger-Sibold 2006; Algeo 1977: *telescopes*) may be generated just as compounds and phrases, with sw_1 and sw_2 that are present in full (Algeo 1977: *syntagmatic blends*). They are blended at converging ends. E.g. *feltribalismo* (8), with phonemic and orthographic overlap. The blend retains the stress pattern of sw_2 . In this case, we can also observe *play with grammar* (Ronneberger-Sibold 2010) in the form of reduction of phrases (*tribalismo feltriano* ‘Feltri’s tribalism’) and right-headedness – while native Italian compounds are typically left-headed.

- (8) *feltribalismo*.N /fel.tri.ba'li.zmo/ (2006) < (Vittorio) *Feltri*.N_{PR} /fel.tri/ x *tribalismo*.N /tri.ba'li.zmo/ ‘loyalty to a particular tribe or group of which one is a member’, i.e. spreading narratives that endorse machismo, racism and populism, just like Vittorio Feltri, right-wing journalist and editorial director of right-wing newspapers

Contour blends (Ronneberger-Sibold 2010: *associative overlap blends*; Algeo 1977: *portmanteaus*) are relatively less transparent. They retain the metrical structure and the stressed syllable (or, minimally, the rime) of one source word or of both source words, as in the classificatory noun *globesità* /glo.be.zi'ta/ ‘globesity’ (2011) < *glob(ale)* /glo'ba.le/ ‘global’ + *obesità* /o.be.zi'ta/ ‘obesity’, with overlap at crossover point, and *Alfetta*.N_{PR} (9), without overlap at switchpoints.

- (9) *Alfetta*.N_{PR} /al'fet.ta/ (2013) < (Angelino) *Alf(ano)*.N_{PR} /al'fa.no/ x (Enrico) (*L*)*etta*.N_{PR} /'let.ta/ ‘Italian Prime Minister’, i.e. the coalition government led by Prime Minister Enrico Letta, leader of the Democrats, and Deputy Prime Minister Angelino Alfano, of the ‘post-ideological’ Five Stars Movement, otherwise opposed to the Democrats

Ludicity and playfulness / jocularity, attention-seeking, memorability and metalinguistic reflexivity are often linked to morphotactic opacity, but morphotactic

³ Splinters (Adams 1973), also called segments or strings, may involve truncation between syllables or within syllables (between syllable onset and nucleus or rime or, within rime, between nucleus and coda).

opacity is modulated via a number of techniques, including a tendency towards polysyllabic blending, alignment of source words at the left or right edge, position-based stress assignment, and *paronymy* (phonetic distance) in contour blends. Paronymy involves word-internal alienation that forms members of minimal pairs across the blend and sw_1 or sw_2 . In Italian, it may create blends via substitution and overlap of words at word edges (Cacchiani 2016). For example, *Bertolesso* /ber.to'les.so/ ((15); sections 2.2 and 2.3) is an attributive blend (Scalise and Bisetto 2009) that exhibits right-edge alignment and substitution of /az/ of /ber.to'la.zo/, with low central unround vowel and voiced fricative, for /ess/ of /les.so/, with mid-front unround vowel and voiceless fricatives. Crucially, in humor research paronymy underlies *heteronymic puns* (Attardo 2020: 189), which rely on phonemic difference. *Alfetta* ((9); section 4.2) is the opposite case, with *homonymy* of the brand name of one of Alfa Romeo's sports cars and the blend *Alfetta* < *Alf(ano)* x (*L*)*etta* (Attardo 2020: 189).

2.1.3 Patterns and schemas

For purposes of this chapter, we share with Booij's (2010) Construction Morphology the basic idea of constructional schemas and of a hierarchical lexicon. Constructs are empirically attested tokens of constructions, or constructional schemas with different degrees of abstractness, which unify properties at the phonological, syntactic and semantico-pragmatic levels. *Berlusconi* (1) and *Alfetta* (9) are based on coordinate compounds (Scalise and Bisetto 2009). They appear to resemble female names such as *Marilena* / *Malena* < *Ma(ri)(a)* 'Mary' + *Ma(dda)lena* 'Magdalene', which instantiate the schema [*Maria*.N_{PR1}-given N_{PR2}]given N_{PR} <> 'personal given name'. One question that we have is, in what ways this may be extended by *Berlusconi* and *Alfetta*. If sets of analogues juxtapose family names of politicians in coordinate structures with a stable meaning (e.g. [N_{PR1}-N_{PR2}]N_{PR} <> 'coalition / agreement / compromise'), then unpredictability could only concern form (morphotactic complexity), and not the relationship between constituents (morphosemantic transparency). Accordingly, the ludic, playful or humorous effect of wordplay is reduced.

For predictability and the outcomes of lexical blending, working within Cognitive Linguistics, Kemmer (2003) argues that when splinters are re-employed by speakers to coin new lexemes, they give way to an effective, new morphological series (Booij 2010: sets of analogical forms), in turn used to understand the new word formations (Kemmer 2003). With time, splinters are reanalysed as new combining forms by means of a gradual delexicalization (Brinton and Traugott 2005:

102–104), entering more abstract schemas. One such case is *-nomics* in the Anglicism *Obamanomics* and sets of analogues.

We see similarity across blends in terms of proportional analogies of the type $a:b=c:x$, where the relation between ‘a’ and ‘b’ serves as a model or analogue for the formation of ‘x’ on the basis of some perceived similarity between the elements of the equation (Arndt-Lappe 2015). In turn, similarity can be graded in two fuzzy categories. *Local analogy* occurs when the user analyses the structure of one particular model analogue or a limited series and substitutes one component; it may bring about pairs of analogues and limited series (i.e. patterns). Sets of analogues, however, may give rise to a relatively more extended pattern and bring about a gradual shift from analogy to schemas, with varying degrees of abstractness (Booij 2010; Mattiello 2017: *analogy by schema*). Analogy-based and schema-based accounts can coexist when the base word is easily recognizable and reinforces the entrenchment of the symbolic schema to which it is linked (Booij 2010).

For instance, *suopolio.N*, meaning ‘Berlusconi’s control of the public broadcasting service’ (16; section 2.2), can be traced back to *duopolio.N* ‘duopoly’, based on paronymic substitution of a voiced dental stop /d/ with the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in a proportional analogy [*duo-* ‘duo-’ : *-polio* ‘-poly’ = *suo* ‘his’ : *-polio* ‘-poly’]. *Secretion* involves changing the segmentation of a free form, discarding part of the word, and associating a meaning to splinters that were originally devoid of meaning (Fradin 2000: 16), with outcomes such as the combining forms *-nomics* and *-stan* in English. Consider *Berlusconistan* (3), formed via analogy by schema with the sense of a ‘a place typified by Berlusconi’. While a PERSON FOR DEFINING PROPERTY FOR COUNTRY metonymic chain (section 2.2) operates on the base, the negative connotations typically associated with the names of Central Asian republics (e.g. *Uzbekistan* and *Kazakhstan*) also carry over onto the complex word: authoritarian regimes, limited political freedoms, state-controlled media, poverty, human rights concerns.

-gate (10) and *-poli* (11) are two widely used combining forms in Italian politics and journalese. They have developed stable lexical meanings and phonetic realizations.

- (10) *Rubygate.N_{PR}* (2010) < *Ruby* (*Rubacuori*).*N_{PR}* ‘Ruby Heartstealer’ + *-gate.COMB.FORM*, i.e. (investigation into the) scandal over Ruby Rubacuori and showgirls hired for dirty parties organized by the affluent politician Berlusconi
- (11) *vallettopoli.N_{PR/N}* (2006) < *valletta.N* ‘showgirl’ + *-poli.COMB.FORM* ‘-gate’, i.e. (investigation into the) scandal over the prostitution of aspiring showgirls who were trafficked to politicians, affluent businessmen, officers and presenters of broadcasting corporations

-gate (10) is an Anglicism and a final combining form that entered Italian along with sets of analogues formed in English on the name *Watergate* – a creative compound in Benzecés (2006; section 2.2). *Watergate*.N_{PR}, meaning ‘gate to the water’, originally identified the *Watergate complex*, overlooking the Potomac River in Washington D.C., and the headquarters of the U.S. Democrats via WHOLE-PART and PLACE-INSTITUTION metonymies. *Watergate* became associated with a major political scandal involving the Nixon administration and leading to Nixon’s resignation in 1974 via a PLACE FOR EVENT metonymy (section 2.2), and in compounds the free form *gate* transitioned to the combining form *-gate*. The latter gradually lost memory of its original meaning and was re-semanticized as ‘corruption scandal’ and other types of scandal in politics, finance, the show business, etc. For instance, *Monicagate*, for the sex scandal involving U.S. President Bill Clinton and Whitehouse intern Monica Lewinsky ((19); section 3).

The neoclassical combining form *-poli* enters two different schemas. *-poli*₁ ‘polis’ is attested in nouns denoting types of cities or towns, with the noun denoting the distinctive feature of the city (e.g. *tendopoli*.N (1923) ‘city of tents’ < *tende* ‘tents’ + *-poli*.COMB.FORM ‘city’, i.e. a makeshift town of tents). Additionally, it forms nicknames of cities in which the first constituent denotes the major export or business for which the city is known. For example, the neighbourhood *Metanopoli*.N_{PR} (1952) ‘Methane City’ (< *metano* ‘methane’ + *-poli*.COMB.FORM ‘city’) was designed and built in San Donato Milanese by ENI, the National Hydrocarbon Agency. In example (4), *Tangentopoli*.N_{PR} is a nickname for ‘town of bribery, or Milan’ (GRADIT: *-poli*). While the recategorization *tangentopoli*.N denotes ‘(any kind of widespread) political corruption scandal’, *-poli*₂ has developed the sense ‘scandal related to N / N_{PR}’ via metonymic extension (PLACE FOR ACTION FOR DEFINING PROPERTY) and a new schema has emerged.

Whereas *-gate* and *-poli*₂ both instantiate the schemas [N_{PR}-COMB.FORM] <> ‘(investigation into the) scandal over N / N_{PR}’, and [N-COMB.FORM] <> ‘(investigation into the) scandal over N / N_{PR}’, they tend to mutually specialize with respect to selectional restrictions. *-gate*, a borrowing from English along with several *-gate* nominals, consistently attaches to full foreign and native proper names, as in *Rubygate*.N_{PR} (10). An additional example is *Pfizergate*.N_{PR} (2020) ‘EU-Pfizer scandal’ (< *Pfizer*.N_{PR} + *-gate*.COMB.FORM). It identifies a scandal related to the lack of transparency surrounding WhatsApp messages exchanged between the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and pharmaceutical company Pfizer in connection with the purchase of COVID-19 vaccines during the pandemic. Conversely, although the neoclassical combining form *-poli*₂ can select proper names (e.g. *RAIopoli* in example (12)), it exhibits a preference for nouns, often selecting

the root, e.g. in the classificatory noun *vallettopoli* < *valletta*.N ‘showgirl’ + *-(o)poli*.COMB.FORM (11).⁴

- (12) *RAIopoli*.N_{PR} (2006) < *RAI*.N_{PR1} (< *Radiotelevisione Italiana*) ‘Italian public broadcasting corporation’ + *-(o)poli* ‘scandal related to N_{PR1}’, i.e. corruption and cronyism scandal concerning the Italian public broadcasting corporation

Classificatory exemplars like *Veltronomics* (13), *Grillonomics* (2013) or *Melonomics* (2022) are formed in Italian along the lines of the Anglicism *Obanomics* and *Obamanomics* (2009). Although it is difficult to argue that proper nouns have roots, we can assume that the same segment is selected. For example, in *Veltronomics* (< (*Walter*) *Veltroni* + *-(o)nomics*) and *Melonomics* (< (*Giorgia*) *Meloni* + *-(o)nomics*) in proportional analogies (Arndt-Lappe 2015) that may lead to the emergence of a restricted pattern or a low-level schema – [N_{PR}-*nomics*]N <> ‘economic views and policies of / named after N_{PR}, politician’. English *-nomics* can also form nouns ‘denoting (often semi-humorous) fields of economics, as specified by the first element’ (OED: *-nomics*, combining form). This sense has not transferred into Italian.

- (13) *Veltronomics*.N (2006) < (*Walter*) *Veltron(i)*.N_{PR} + *-nomics*.COMB.FORM, i.e. the economic views and policies of Walter Veltroni, leader of the Democrats

Regarding the free form *exit*, a series of analogues is formed in Italian via analogy on *Brexit* (2015) and other Anglicisms, e.g. *Italexit*: [N_{PR}-(e)xit]N <> ‘withdrawal of government N_{PR} from superordinate political body’ in (5). However, we can still observe semantic and formal variation in word formations like *Renxit* (14): with a given name as sw_i, it exhibits overlap at switchpoints and denotes the ‘withdrawal of support from Renzi’s government and policies’. Because meaning and structure are not fully predictable, we assume the presence of a pattern (or a restricted series of analogues) rather than a relatively entrenched schema.

- (14) *Renxit*.N_{PR} /renk.sit/ (2016) < (*Matteo*) *Renz(i)*.N_{PR} /rɛn.tsi/ / x *ex(i)t*.N /ek.sit/, i.e. withdrawal of support for the government coalition led by Prime Minister Renzi; withdrawal of support for the ideas and policies championed by Matteo Renzi

⁴ Given that Italian morphology is predominantly arranged in thematic and radical bases (Dressler and Thornton 1991), it is not surprising that the foreign secreted combining form *-gate* tends to select full words. However, there are some exceptions to the above tendencies. For example, *Juve-gate* is formed departing from a clipping of the base, e.g. *Juve* (< *Juventus*) + *-gate*. Moreover, the native combining form *-(o)poli* may feature a linking vowel *-o*. The linking vowel is a typical marker of neoclassical compounding in Italian (Ralli 2008; Iacobini and Thornton 2016), but it only becomes discernible when the left-hand lexeme ends in a different vowel, e.g. *fangopoli* (< *fango* ‘mud’ + *-(o)poli*) vs. *mafìopoli* (< *mafia* + *-(o)poli*).

2.2 Semantics

The semantic plausibility of the correspondence relations (Langacker 1987: *valence relations*) between source words (Langacker 1987: *constituents*) within the composite structure, is among the factors that have an impact on the morphosemantic transparency of blends and compounds. Another important factor in our data is semantico-encyclopaedic knowledge. Indeed, the inability to interpret blends from proper names like *Alfetta* (9), depends on a failure of semantico-encyclopaedic knowledge and shared common ground between the participants in the communicative situation. Complexity is reduced in degrees when a proper name combines with nouns or other lexical categories, when the correspondence relation is readily identifiable, e.g. in the attributive *Bertolesso* (15), and when the blend is an appellative noun formed on nouns ((2): *accoglione*).

Additionally, using analogy and schemas to analyse the blend facilitates comprehension in sets of analogical word formations, e.g. [N_{PR1}-N_{PR2}]N_{PR} <> ‘coalition / agreement / compromise of N_{PR1} and N_{PR2}’ in *Alfetta* (9) and *Berlusconi* (1). Another facilitating factor are constituents that support fairly stable meanings and correspondence relations, e.g. *exit* in *Italexit* (7), based on sets of analogues like *Brexit*, all the way to combining forms such as *-poli* and *-gate* in constructs that have developed stable lexical meanings and phonetic realizations ((10): *Rubygate*; (11): *vallettopoli*).

As thorough comparison of the morphosemantic complexity of different types of blends and related word formations is beyond the scope of this investigation, we proceed equipped with working definitions that enable us to provide encyclopaedic descriptions of the lexemes and link them to certain socio-pragmatic effects. For the semantics of the correspondence relation in the composite structure, we rely on Benczes’s (2006) critical appraisal of Warren’s (1978) semantic relations. Given that figuration characterizes a good part of lexemes in the corpus, for the semantics of the composite structure we draw on her work on English *creative compounds*, or compounds that variously utilize conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy: they use creative associations that exist between concepts, based on similarity, analogy or contiguity.

Conceptual metonymy is the cognitive process in which one conceptual entity (Langacker 1993: 30: *vehicle*) provides mental access to another conceptual entity (Langacker 1987: *target*), within the same *Idealized Cognitive Model* (ICM; Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1999), e.g. PART FOR WHOLE, PLACE FOR THE INSTITUTION (Radden and Kövecses 1999). *Conceptual metaphor* is an operational ICM (Lakoff 1987). It is the understanding of one Target domain or concept in terms of a Source domain or concept, e.g. PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, CLEANLINESS IS MORALITY. Conceptual metaphor realizes the type of *conceptual integration / blending* that Fauconnier

and Turner (1998, 2002) call single-scope blends, where the two input spaces of the blend correspond to the source and target domain. Different compound types variously activate the modifier, the head (Langacker 1993: *profile determinant*), the relationship between the modifier and the profile determinant, or the compound as a whole. To take one example, the interpretation of *Bertolesso* (15) ‘numb, braindead, useless Guido Bertolaso’ is grounded in a metaphorical relationship (Warren 1978: *resemblance*) between the head name (i.e. *Bertolaso*, sw₁) and its adjectival modifier (i.e. *lesso* ‘boiled, poached’, sw₂). That is, ‘Bertolaso IS boiled meat’. Additionally, the metaphor IDEAS ARE FOOD operates on the modifier: *lesso* ‘boiled meat’ is a conventional metaphor for ‘numb’, with metonymic A-N conversion in *lesso*.

- (15) *Bertolesso*.N_{PR} /ber.to.'les.so/ (2019) < (*Guido*) *Berto*l(as)O.N_{PR} /ber.to.'la.zo/ x *lesso*.A ‘boiled, poached’ /'les.so/, i.e. useless Guido Bertolaso, Italian Commissioner for Civil Protection in Italy and later Councilor for Health for the Lombardy region during the COVID-19 pandemic

To better elucidate the semantics of creative compounds, Benczes (2006) further integrates conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy into conceptual blending. Two Input spaces reflect the conceptual content of the compound constituents; the Blended space contains the emergent structure of the compound, which combines the projections provided by the inputs via composition and background knowledge via completion (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 48–49). More complex structures are also possible (Benczes 2006). For the interpretation of adjective-noun combinations, e.g. *red ball* ‘ball that is red’, Sweetser (1999) provides an integrated approach that brings together notions from Langacker’s (1987) Cognitive Grammar, blended spaces and conceptual metaphor and metonymy. Consider *suopolio* (16): in one Input space, the noun profiles the referent / entity in sw₂ as the concept (belonging to the category) *monopolio* ‘monopoly’ and / or *duopolio* ‘duopoly’; based on shared structure in the Generic space (‘possession of abstract entity’), the adjective in Input 1 (*suo* ‘his’) elaborates an active zone (‘ownership’) of the entity profiled by the noun for possession by a male. Completion provides encyclopaedic knowledge in the Blended space.

- (16) *suopolio*.N /su.o.'pɔ.ljo/ (2004) < (s)uo.A /su.o/ x *duopolio*.N /du.o'pɔ.ljo/ | *monopolio*.N /mo.no'pɔ.ljo/ | *-polio*.COMB.FORM, i.e. Silvio Berlusconi’s Rai-Mediaset monopoly as Prime Minister of the RAI, the Italian public broadcasting corporation, and of his family-owned Mediaset broadcasting channels

2.3 Socio-pragmatic effects

The examples in sections 2.1 and 2.2 range from more playful and less morphotactically transparent lexical blends (contour blends), through less playful and more transparent blends (e.g. complete blends and semi-complete blends which retain most of sw_1 and sw_2), to sets of analogues, and nominals formed with combining forms that exhibit stable meanings and predictable outcomes, e.g. *-nomics*. Particularly, lexical blends enter giornalese and political discussion for diverse and often overlapping socio-pragmatic effects (Colston 2015, 2017), which may complement or even override descriptive interests.

Cleverness has different functions: it enhances *memorability* (Lehrer 2003) and, for that matter, attracts attention to the denoted referent and associated meanings. Wordplay is generally seen as ludic and jocular – and blends are indeed clever, unexpected, and ingenious (i.e. *creative*) in degrees. In this connection, it is important to note that Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994: 198) distinguish between the notions of Ludic and Playful (i.e. ‘jocular’). If, on the one hand, Ludic is defined as a deliberate choice of “amused detachment” by the Addresser / Speaker, who acts somewhat recklessly without taking full responsibility for what he / she is going to say, a Playful attitude is characterised by open jocularly and less detachment. In this scenario, Irony is depicted as being more akin to a Ludic attitude rather than a Playful one. Instead, humor would perhaps more readily carry a playful attitude (Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi 1994).

Humor is a general pragmatic effect that is germane to Irony and other figurative tropes (Colston 2015), based on deceived expectations about specific idealized cognitive models, an element of surprise and, more specifically, *incongruity* – in plain English, semantic anomalies – that surfaces in various guises, from paronymy and unpredictable use of language (e.g. morphotactically non-transparent blends) through to register clashes and stylistic inappropriateness within the composite structure. As the outcome of the tension release that comes with perceiving and resolving incongruity (Attardo 2020), it is generally considered delightful, and often accompanied by laughter and smiles.

Humor and figurative tropes like Irony (which is particular to expressing negativity) or Metaphor (a form of Meaning Enrichment) may contribute to the *Ingratiation* function, which benefits the speaker (Colston 2015): the speaker compliments the hearer by assuming that the hearer has the capacity to reach the intended interpretation. In turn, ingratiation fosters a sense of associative affiliation and shared community, for which we use *Inclusion* as a cover term. Thus, humor assists with Meaning Enrichment and contributes to ingratiation in the experience and appreciation of the metaphorical blend *Bertolessio* ((15); section 2.1.3), which carries a negative evaluation. While the conventional metaphor

lesso ‘dumb’ is used for derision, paronymy achieves jocularly and humor to modulate negativity (section 4.2).

Crucially, negative evaluatives and extreme negative evaluation for Bad and Wrong constitute a good part of the lexemes in our catalogue. Evaluatively negative constituents in complex words are often *dysphemisms*, or “expression[s] with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum or to the audience, or both, and are [typically] substituted for a neutral or euphemistic expression for just that reason” (Allan and Burridge 1991: 26).

Although they may be used non-dysphemistically to display intimacy and build community (Liu, this volume), dysphemisms involve aggravation (Merlini Barbaresi 1997–1998): they are means of expression that may render the speech act (Searle and Vanderveken 1985) more risky for the addresser or the addressee’s positive face (Brown and Levinson 1987: face threatening acts). For example, though negative, *lesso* ‘numb, useless, idiot’ in *Bertolesso* ((15), (31); section 2.1.3) can only be slightly offensive in context (section 4.2). Taboo words which refer to body parts and bodily functions (e.g. *coglioni*₁ ‘bollocks’, slang for testicles; *coglioni*₂ ‘assholes’, slang for downright idiot) can be extremely offensive and have a strong potential for aggravation and aggression. Compared to *lesso*, in *accoglioni* ((2); section 4.2) *coglioni*₂ intensifies the speaker’s evaluation on the scale of idiocy, the speaker’s commitment and the underlying speech act. *Accoglioni* (2) is derogatory, meaning ‘pro-immigration assholes’. In the increasingly polarised and divided political climate (van Dijk 1998), the strong negative evaluations of right- and left-wing systems of values and ideologies by their respective opponents play an important part in the semantics of word formation in journalese and political language. As is natural, evaluative lexemes in this context pursue socio-pragmatic effects such as *Expressing Negativity* – primarily Disagreement and Aggression towards a Target, and are especially intended to ridicule (Colston 2015, 2017) the referent. The referent represents cultural and ideological targets, ranging from people, through activities and beliefs, to events and situations.

Moving beyond taboo words, the constituents of the composite structure may be interpreted in relation to taboo topics and behaviours that are generally considered objectionable, unacceptable and / or morally wrong based on the social norms, culture and religious beliefs of a specific community. Consider, for instance, media coverage of the extremely secretive proceedings of the conclave as if it were a reality show ((18): *Conclavity*; section 3); transformism in politics ((29): *Giudalfano* / *GiudAlfano*; section 4.2); corruption ((4): *Tangentopoli*, *tangentopoli*; sections 2.1.2 and 4.1); sex scandals ((10): *Rubygate*; (11): *vallettopoli*; sections 2.1.2 and 4.1).

Given the primarily written nature of our corpus (see section 3), the expression of negativity is mostly third-party oriented. Negative evaluation involves out-group *Exclusion* and disalignment, as the out-group's values, actions and beliefs that are accessed through the referent of the word formations are challenged, ridiculed and attacked in various ways. On the other hand, negative evaluation can contribute to ingratiation, enhance complicity and work towards Associative Affiliation, agreement and alignment with shared values – i.e. it is a reliable form of inclusion of like-minded addressees within the particular community (Lalić-Krstin and Silaški, this volume; Liu, this volume).

Hyperbole merges with metaphor in blends like *Berluscong* / *berluscong* (17), in order to create a counterfactual scenario that maximizes the scalar value in *sw*₂, the metaphorical head: 'a follower of Berlusconi IS a vietcong'. *Berluscong* was first used in 2006 as a byname for Lucio Malan, a Senator elected for Berlusconi's Forza Italia. In the Higher Chamber in the Italian Parliament, he first threw a book at the Speaker, and then barricaded himself for eight hours after being expelled. The shift from name to noun is motivated via the MEMBER FOR CATEGORY metonymy.

- (17) *berluscong*.N/N_{PR} /ber.lus'kong/ (2006) < (Silvio) *Berlusconi*(i).N_{PR} /ber.lu'sko.ni/ x (*Viet*)*cong*(g).N / N_{PR} /vjet'kong/, i.e. Lucio Malan; a guerrilla-politician and a staunch supporter of Berlusconi's views and policies; a staunch supporter of Berlusconi's Forza Italia party "C'è bisogno di **Berluscong**? Nessuno è più **berluscong** di Lucio Malan."⁵
'Do we need **Berluscong**? No-one can embody a **berluscong** better than Lucio Malan.'

Hyperbole is used for *Highlighting Discrepancies* between the reality and a desired scenario, which reflects the (common-sense) views of Gian Antonio Stella, journalist and critic of Forza Italia's signature features. Communist-driven Viet Congs fought as part of an unofficial army against an official army and government, hence the classificatory noun *Vietcong*, designating an unofficial army fighting against institutions. In democracies, instead, Members of Parliament engage in positive and constructive arguments. Although POLITICS IS WAR, "Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed" (Ratcliff 2017: Mao Zedong). In the value system of the journalist and his readers, *Berluscong* / *berluscong* expresses negativity.

Besides *Expressing Negativity*, *Verbal Irony* in (17) contributes to *Highlighting Discrepancies*: the rhetorical question, uttered in relation to the barricade event, is in fact interpreted as a negative statement (*We don't need Berluscong* / *ber-*

5 https://www.gazzetta.it/altrimondi/catalogodeiventi09/scheda_personaggio.shtml?lettera=m&id=52. (accessed 1 March 2025).

*luscong*s). In the blend, verbal irony emerges via paronymy. Semantically, one cause of incongruity lies in mapping traits such as *Communist-driven* and *unofficial army* in the Vietcong ICM onto Lucio Malan and staunch supporters of Forza Italia – an *anti-Communist* liberal-conservative political party in a constitutional democracy. There is *Situational Irony* in the fact that Lucio Malan is banned from representing his celebrity leader in Parliament. Yet, this even earned him a much stronger reputation as a staunch supporter and acolyte in Berlusconi's inner circle, as well as a paragon of the anti-Communist Forza Italia movement – someone who Berlusconi and his followers trust to represent them within institutions. As the discussion suggests, the interpretation of irony depends heavily on shared common ground, or knowledge and conceptual structures shared between the addresser / Speaker (S) and the addressee / Hearer (H) – including recent co-experience, community membership, the particular co-text and culture – for its interpretation and comprehension. While semantico-encyclopaedic knowledge and shared common ground are key to interpreting our data, they enable the speaker to appreciate and resolve incongruity, and compute differences between the particular utterance and the ironic interpretation via *relevant inappropriateness* (Colston 2015: 108). *Positive Irony* conveys a positive evaluation and gently mitigates aggression; *Negative Irony* (*Sarcasm*; Attardo 2001, 2020) conveys negativity and shows potential for aggression.

3 Data selection and methodology

At this stage of research, the analysis is primarily qualitative, based on a pool of 250 appellative nouns and proper names in the domain of Italian politics that have been mediated through the press, and more generally, online news outlets with informative goals. Apart from native word formations (e.g. (1): *Berlusconi*; (2): *accoglione*), the dataset is comprised of borrowings like *Berlusconistan* (3) and English-Italian hybrids (Iacobini 2015) such as *Renxit* (14). Pseudo-Anglicisms (Görlach 2001) are hardly ever present ((18); (19), possibly adapted from English *sexgate*).

- (18) *Conclavity*.N / N_{PR} /kon'kla.vi.ti/ (2013) < *conclav(e)*.N /kon'kla.ve/ x (re)ḡ(ḡ)ḡity.N /ri'a.li.ti/ (< IT *reality (show)* (1999) < EN *reality show*), i.e. non-stop media coverage of the 2013 Conclave – the assembly of the cardinals gathered for the election of the Pope in the Vatican City
- (19) *sexygate*.N_{PR} (2013) < *sexy*.A + *-gate*.COMB.FORM, i.e. Sexgate, Monicagate, sex scandal involving U.S. President Bill Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky

All lexemes were selected from a larger catalogue of approximately 2000 items. This relies in turn on a preliminary list of items drawn from the relevant literature on Italian word formation, which was further expanded to include items from online reference tools. All words were cross-checked for date of first attestation, morphosyntactic information, etymology, meaning description and semantico-encyclopaedic information, as well as usage examples and extended concordances. To that purpose, we further looked up Italian encyclopaedic dictionaries and databases of Italian new words and neologisms (often nonce formations; Bauer 1983: 42), online encyclopaedias, the Italian Timestamped JSI Corpus (Bušta et al. 2017) – recently expanded into the Italian Trends corpus – and the Italian Web 2020 corpus (itTenTen20; Jakubíček et al. 2013) available through Sketch Engine (Kilgarrieff et al. 2014). Concordance lines and the surrounding text were retrieved complementing information from those sources with Google queries restricted to the .it domain.⁶ Given our focus on politics and the press and the make-up of the corpus, the vast majority of lexemes and surrounding texts come from written information genres such as articles and reports, comments and editorials, as well as interviews, publications in the official press, on institutional and non-institutional blogs and webpages about government and politics.

The database was annotated for date of first attestation (where available), lexical category of lexemes and constituents, native or foreign status of both lexemes and constituents. We also assessed whether constituents and lexemes exhibited neutral, positive or negative evaluation in context, with regard to ethical considerations relating to issues of right / wrong and good / bad and the underlying ideologies. Semantico-encyclopaedic meaning descriptions of constituents and composite structure were also given, based on cross-examination of information from reference tools and corpus data. Additionally, one extended concordance line was included, along with a jump link to all surrounding texts.

Regarding the lexical category of the composite structure and its constituents, with few exceptions the corpus is comprised of proper names (139x; 55.6%), appel-

⁶ The following encyclopaedic dictionaries were consulted: De Mauro's GRADIT (*Grande Dizionario Italiano di Riferimento*, 1999–2007) and *Il Nuovo De Mauro* (n.d.); DISC (*Dizionario Sabatini Coletti*, 2008); *Nuovo Devoto-Oli. Il vocabolario dell'Italiano contemporaneo 2024* (NDO24); *Vocabolario Treccani* (n.d.). Additional data comes from encyclopaedia, primarily *Enciclopedia Treccani* (n.d.). Treccani's new words of the year (*Neologismi* n.d.) and their word lovers' weekly guide of new words (Treccani's blog, *Neologismi della Settimana* n.d.) were also used to complement information from Adamo and Della Valle's (2018) *Il vocabolario Treccani. Neologismi. Parole nuove dai giornali 2008–2018* (2018) and the associated online database (*Parole Nuove dai Giornali*; ONLI n.d.). For Anglicisms (both complex words and constituents), we consulted the *Oxford English Dictionary*, third edition (OED n.d.).

lative nouns (69x; 27.5%) and lexemes that are used as nouns and adjectives (42x; 16,8%). This appears to reflect the need for politics and the news to designate new concepts, facts of the day and more generally developments in culture and the world.

Proper names are more frequently formed with combining forms attaching on proper names ((20): *Calabrigate*), nouns or nouns that are used also as adjectives (92x; 36.8%). The second major category comprises proper names formed by two constituent names (33x; 13.2%) that are juxtaposed in an underlying coordinate combination (Scalise and Bisetto 2009), e.g. the blend *Eurabia* (21). The least frequent combination includes proper names formed by nouns and / or adjectival nouns that attach on proper names, either in first or second position (14x; 5.6%) ((15): *Bertolessu*; (22): *assesSoru*).

- (20) *Calabrigate*.N_{PR} (2007) < *Calabria*.N_{PR} + *-gate*.COMB.FORM, i.e. corruption investigation conducted by the judiciary team of Catanzaro, capital of the Calabria region
- (21) *Eurabia*.N_{PR} /ew'ra.bja/ (2005) < *Eur(op)ā*.N_{PR} 'Europe' /ew'rɔ.pa/ x (*A*)*rabiā*.N_{PR} /a'ra.bja/, i.e. the Islamization of Europe; the Eurabia conspiracy theory
- (22) *assesSoru*.N_{PR} /as.ses'sɔ.ru/ (2014) < *assessor(e)*.N /as.ses'so.re/ x (*Renato*) *Soru*.N_{PR} /sɔ.ru/, i.e. byname given to the Democrat Francesco Pigliaru by the previous governor of the Sardinia region, of the opposite party, accusing him of being politically close to Sardinian businessman and politician Renato Soru, a Democrat

Among appellative nouns, blends with nouns as source words (41x; 16.4%), e.g. *oppofinzione* (23), largely outnumber blends that combine a proper name and a noun (17x; 6.8%), e.g. *berluscong* (17), or a noun and an adjective (11x; 4.4%), as in *pacifinto* (24). Blends of adjectives and nouns are the least frequent in our data, e.g. *suopolio* in (16).

- (23) *oppofinzione*.N /op.po.fin'tsjo:ne/ (2020) < *oppo(s)izione*.N /op.po.zi'tsjo:ne/ 'opposition party / coalition' x *finzione*.N 'fiction' /fin'tsjo:ne/, i.e. useless opposition parties and policies, which have no impact
- (24) *pacifinto*.N /pa.tʃi'fin.to/ (2003) < *pacifi(sta)*.N / A /pa.tʃi'fi.sta/ x *finto*.A 'fake' /fin.to/, i.e. a fake pacifist; a self-proclaimed pacifist who does not actively work for peace

4 Data Analysis

This section provides a qualitative investigation into a restricted set of items that range from word formations with evaluatively neutral semantics, through to

word formations that convey negative valuation and word formations that realize negative irony. As will be seen, positive evaluation is hardly ever present. Secondly, irony is mostly negative and intended for aggression and out-group exclusion as against associative affiliation, but the expression of negativity is sometimes mitigated through humor, in the form of wordplay.

4.1 Evaluatively neutral formations

Evaluatively neutral nominals in our data are comprised of proper names for events and initiatives promoted by certain parties or institutions. For instance, the proper name *SaniTour*. This is a metonymic contour blend that retains its descriptive value based on the appellative nouns in sw_1 and sw_2 , formed on sets of analogues like the clipping *Vaffatour* in politics, *Vinotour*, *Mototour* in the tourist industry, and many more.⁷ The underlying schema is used to interpret the proper name.

- (25) *SaniTour*.N_{PR}/sa.ni'tur/ (2015) < *sani*(à).N /sa.ni'ta/ 'healthcare' | *Sani*(à).N_{PR} // 'National Health Service' x *tour*.N /tur/, i.e. tour of local health service agencies promoted by the Five Stars Movement to gather suggestions and recommendations that can help improve the National Health Service

Section 2.1.3 considered *-nomics* classificatory nouns that are evaluatively neutral and serve descriptive functions. For instance, *Veltronomics* (2007), *Grillonomics* (2013), *Melonomics* (2022) are formed in Italian via analogy by schema. Another set of analogues, we argued, is formed in Italian on the Anglicism *Brexit* (and analogues). It comprises *Italexit* (2016), with country name, *Venexit* (2016) (<*Veng*(to) x (*e*)*xit* | *Veneto* + #*exit*) and *Toscanexit* (2020) (<*Toscan*(a) 'Tuscany' x *exit* | *Toscana* 'Tuscany' + #*exit*), with regional names. They instantiate the pattern [N_{PR}-*exit* | N_{PR}-#*exit*]N_{PR} <> 'withdrawal of government N_{PR} from superordinate political institution', where all toponyms are actors. Expanding the pattern, however, may be cause for incongruity-based humor and irony in *Renxit* (2016) (14), with a shift from N_{PR} as originator of the action to N_{PR} as the object argument and undergoer. Whereas Prime Minister Renzi is quite happy with his policies, *Renxit* denotes withdrawal of support for the Prime Minister, and via the AGENT FOR ACTION and the PERSON (RESPONSIBLE) FOR INSTITUTION(AL PARTY) metonymies, for those policies and

⁷ *Vaffatour*.N_{PR} /vaf.fa'tur/ (2007) < *Vaffa(nculo)*.INT /vaf.fan'ku.lo/ 'F**k you' x *tour*.N /tur/, i.e. presidential campaign tour organized by the Five Stars' Movement to get rid of established political parties.

the ruling party. An earlier formation is *Crocexit* (2015) (< (*Rosario*) *Crocg(tta) x exit*), meaning ‘withdrawal of support to Rosario Crocetta, Governor of the Sicily region’.

Evaluatively neutral classificatory blends based on coordinate compounds that juxtapose nouns denoting members of the same category instantiate entrenched schemas in Italian.⁸ One of several examples in the political domain is the semi-complete blend *cattocomunista* (1979) ‘a Communist that is Catholic’ (6), with *sw*₁ elaborating the active zone ‘religion’ in *sw*₂.

Other exemplars instantiate the schema [family *N*_{PR1}-family *N*_{PR2}]*N*_{PR} <> ‘coalition / team of *N*_{PR1} and *N*_{PR2}’. Family names afford access to political parties via the PERSON (RESPONSIBLE) FOR INSTITUTION(AL PARTY) metonymy; the blends are metonymical as a whole, in that they designate a team, a coalition or an informal agreement for mutual support. When the participants share ideological proximity, names of like-minded people with common goals combine in an evaluatively neutral blend that denotes coalitions of close political parties. A slightly different example is the contour blend *Grilleggio*, where the referents are members of the same party (26).

- (26) *Grilleggio*.*N*_{PR} /gril'led.ʒʒo/ (2015) < (*Beppe*) *Grill(o)*.*N*_{PR1} /'gril.lo/ x (*Gianroberto*) (*Casa*)*leggio*.*N*_{PR2} /ka.za'led.ʒʒo /, i.e. the coalition of Beppe Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio, teaming up as joint leaders of the Five Stars Movement

Another example is *Alfetta* < (*Angelino*) *Alf(ano) x (Gianni) (L)etta* (9). This is one of several instantiations of what we may call the [*N*_{PR1}-*N*_{PR2}]*N*_{PR} ‘coalition’ schema, which designates agreements and compromises, coalitions and governments run by party leaders with different ideologies. An early example is *Berlingotti* < (*Enrico*) *Berling(uer) x (Giulio) (Andre)otti*. The blend was coined in 1973 to designate the ‘historic compromise’, which saw Berlinguer’s Communist party vote for the ruling Catholic Democrats led by Giulio Andreotti. It was deemed an important win-win for both parties and an expedient trade-off for Italy.

In context the *Alfetta* coalition might be understood via a PERSONIFICATION metaphor and the TRAIT FOR PERSON metonymy, as a way to wish a quick and promising early start to the coalition government. Positive undertones can attach to the blend based on semantico-encyclopaedic knowledge, as *Alfetta*, a hypocoristic for *Alfetta* (159), is the nickname of Alfa Romeo’s much loved *Tipo 159* Formula 1 car,

⁸ Other constructs comprise classificatory nouns designating animal and vegetal hybrids (*tigone* ‘tigon’ (1984) < *tig(re)* ‘tiger’ + *le(one)* ‘lion’, i.e. the offspring of a tiger and a lioness), names of languages in contact and of mixed ethnic groups (*italiolo*.*N* / *N*_{PR} (2010) ‘Italo-Spanish’ < *itali(ano)*.*N* / *N*_{PR} ‘Italian’ + (*spagn*)*olo*.*N* / *N*_{PR} ‘Spanish’, *italiese*.*N* / *N*_{PR} (1986) ‘Italo-English’ < *itali(ano)*.*N* / *N*_{PR} ‘Italian’ + (*ingl*)*ese*.*N* / *N*_{PR} ‘English’) (Thornton 2004a).

which won the car maker the first Formula 1 World Championship, but also the name of Alfa Romeo's most successful sports coupes. When uttered in the context of the slow pace of government decision-making, irony emerges via incongruity resolution: contrary to expectations, the blend loses the well-wishing dimension and positive evaluation originally associated with the homonymous product name *Alfetta*.N_{PR} (< *Alfa*.N_{PR} + *-etta*.DIM.F.S) and is computed as 'Alfano and Letta are no Alfetta at all'. This would suggest some kind of dynamic evolution, in the sense of the blend changing its evaluative dimension.

Turning to *-gate* and *-poli*, negative evaluation is part of the semantics of the combining form '(investigation into) the scandal over N / N_{PR}', e.g. *RAIopoli* (12) or *Calabriagate* (20). Negative irony is not at issue. However, situational irony should be taken into account when we look at the proper name *Tangentopoli*.N_{PR} 'City of Bribery' (4). Originally, the name was intentionally coined in the press in connection with the first and largest investigation into political corruption, conducted in particular by Milan's judicial prosecutors. The place stands metonymically for its inhabitants and for the investigation. While reflecting widespread public indignation, *tangente* 'bribe' metonymically evokes *greed* and *corruption*, the DEFINING PROPERTIES of the town (Radden and Kövecses 1999). Ironically, this contrasted with the then-current stereotype of a vibrant town, and the high-end jobs, elegant and affluent lifestyle (including partying and drinking) associated with it (so-called *Milano da bere* 'lit. Milan to drink'). The recategorization into classificatory noun *tangentopoli*.N, designating 'any kind of political widespread (political) (corruption) scandal' has lost the original ironic undertones.

Somewhat hyperbolically, in tabloids *-gate* is found in combination with mundane words to highlight outrageous behaviour, as in the classificatory *cannagate*.N (2018) < *canna*.N 'joint' + *-gate*.COMB.FORM 'scandal over smoking joints' (i.e. rumours that one of the contestants on a reality show has been smoking cannabis). Viewers may want to look at how these facts unfolds out of curiosity. A similar example, which does not require any kind of investigation, is *letto-gate*.N (2021) < *letto*.N 'bed' + *-gate*.COMB.FORM. This is not a scandal, but rather an argument about the allocation of a bed on a reality show. In both cases, humor is incongruity-based and involves a deception of expectations in *-gate* formations that refer to partly scripted and inconsequential events on shows rather than to major scandals in real life.

4.2 Negative evaluatives and irony

In the preceding analysis, we have seen that specific blends and other word formations can be equally neutral, and not able to realize irony. Importantly, in

themselves given names and family names are neutral. Yet exemplars of the [N_{PR1}-N_{PR2}]N_{PR} ‘coalition / agreement / compromise’ schema are mostly negative evaluations and exemplify forms of negative irony when describing coalition and agreements between ideologically distant factions, or coalitions between ideologically close parties that eventually fall out – which turns out to damage either party. Consider *Prodinotti* (27) and *Berluscotti* (1).

- (27) *Prodinotti*.N_{PR}/pro.di'nɔt.ti/ (1997) < (Romano) *Prodi*.N_{PR1}/prɔ.di/ x (Giulio) *(Bert)inotti*.N_{PR2}/berti'nɔtti/, i.e. internal contrasts and opposition run by Fausto Bertinotti within Romano Prodi's coalition government

Prodinotti foregrounds a contrast relation in the blend. It was only coined as Fausto Bertinotti, leader of the smallest party in Romano Prodi's ruling coalition, brought down the coalition government. As a result, Bertinotti paved the way to Berlusconi's second government, from which he didn't benefit. This suggests that, with the exception of Berlinguer and Andreotti's rare and highly acclaimed 'historic compromise' (*Berlingotti*; section 4.1), names of coalitions between ideologically distant politicians take ironic overtones. Irony and derision also target the referents of *Berlusvalter* (2008) (7) and *Walteroni* (28).⁹ Among rumors of a compromise between Walter Veltroni (leader of the center-left Democrats and member of the ruling coalition) and Berlusconi (leader of the largest opposition party) over a new electoral law that would benefit Berlusconi, the journalist Giovanni Pansa asks Veltroni if this is actually happening. Ludic wordplay explains the juxtaposition of blends with inverted source words and same referent (the coalition), in *Berlusvalter* and *Walteroni*, formed via local analogy on Giovanni Pansa's *Dalemoni* (28). The hearer must be able to recognize sarcasm based on shared common ground: the coalition is not deemed beneficial for *Veltroni*, in the same way that Berlusconi's actions were detrimental for *D'Alema*, former leader of the Democrats and Prime Minister. Hence the annoyance in Veltroni's reply to Mr Pansa.

- (28) *Walteroni* (2008) < *Walter (Veltroni) x (Silvio) (Berlusc)oni*, i.e. an (unlikely) coalition (government) of Walter Veltroni's Democrats and Silvio Berlusconi's ideologically opposed Forza Italia
Dalemoni (1996) < (*Massimo*) *D'Alem(a) x (Silvio) (Berlusc)oni*, i.e. a monster that looks like Berlusconi and speaks like Berlusconi
 Pansa: “È nato **Berlusvalter** o **Walteroni**?”
 ‘Did you start a new coalition, **Berlusvalter** or **Walteroni**?’

⁹ <https://lespresso.it/c/politica/2007/11/21/io-e-il-cavaliere-a-carte-scoperte/30237>. (accessed 1 March 2025).

Veltroni: “Senta, Pansa, dopo **Dalemoni** non ne inventi un'altra.”
 ‘Listen, Pansa. Do not make up another one after coining the name
Dalemoni.’

Other blends carry strong negative evaluation based on the active zone elaborated by epithets, evaluative nouns and adjectives. Consider the complete blend *Giudalfano* / *GiudAlfano* (29), with metaphorical relationship between constituents and a PERSON FOR QUALITY metonymy on the epithet, *Giuda*. The byname is derogatory, as it designates Angelino Alfano, the Turncoat: counting among Berlusconi's closest acolytes for many years, and one of his ministers, Alfano eventually deserted Berlusconi and did not support the vote of no confidence against Gianni Letta's government. Hence Berlusconi's address to Alfano (29).

(29) *Giudalfano* / *GiudAlfano*.N_{PR} /dʒu.dal'fa.no/ (2014) < *Giuda* (*Iscariota*).N_{PR1} /dʒu.da/ 'Judas Iscariot' x (*Angelino*) *Alfano*.N_{PR2} /al'fa.no/, i.e. Angelino Alfano, the Turncoat, who deserted Berlusconi

Berlusconi: “Caro **Giudalfano**, è nei momenti difficili che si vedono i veri amici.”¹⁰
 ‘Dear **Giudalfano** [Alfano the Turncoat], you know who your friends are in times of hardships.’

Paronymy in contour blends performs wordplay in *Aledanno* (30), *Bertolesso* ((15), (31)), *euroinomane* (32), *gretino* (33), which are variously humorous, ironic or sarcastic in the co-text. *Aledanno* is ludic rather than playful.

(30) *Aledanno*.N_{PR} /ale'dan.no/ (2014) < (*Gianni*) *Alemanno*.N_{PR} /a.le'man.no/ x *danno*.N /'dan.no/ 'damage', i.e. Gianni Alemanno's political mismanagement of Rome

“Oh, certo: i fedelissimi concorderanno, diranno che la Raggi è solo vittima dell'attacco mediatico organizzato dal PD. Ma in realtà i cittadini romani stanno cominciando a rimpiangere la giunta Alemanno. E se consideriamo che, per come ha amministrato Roma, era chiamato **Aledanno**” ...¹¹

‘Oh, sure: loyalists will agree, they are going to argue that Raggi is just a victim of the media attack organized by the Democrats. In fact, the citizens of Rome are beginning to regret Alemanno's government. And let us not forget that he was called **Aledanno** [Alemanno the Damage Maker] for the way he governed Rome’ ...

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/EsercitiDiSilvioUfficiale/> (accessed 1 March 2025).

¹¹ Italian Trends (19 June 2017): https://www.julienews.it/notizia/editoriali/virginia-raggi-prova-ancora-a-prendere-per-i-fondelli-i-romani/373482_editoriali_11.html.

- (31) “I suoi detrattori, dentro Forza Italia, lo chiamano perfidamente **Bertolesso**. Lui, il ‘dottor Guido’, non molla (‘se venite con me in giro, altro che sondaggi’, fa sapere), anche se per tutto il giorno le voci su un suo imminente ritiro sono girate in maniera vorticosa.”¹²
 ‘Within [his party,] Forza Italia, his detractors, mockingly call him **Bertolesso** [Bertolaso the useless Dumb]. He, “Dr. Guido”, does not give up (“Come with me, and you will see everything but the confirmation of the poll ratings”, he claims), although rumors of his imminent withdrawal from politics have been flying nonstop all day.’

Euroinomane expresses negativity and ridicule towards the target.

- (32) *euroinomane*.N /ew.ro.i.no.ma.ne/ (2015) < *Euro(pa)*.N_{PR} /ew'ro.pa/ ‘Europe’ | *euro*-.COMB.FORM x *eroinomane*.N /e.ro.i.no.ma.ne/ ‘heroin addict’, i.e. EU addicts, a derogatory term referring to those who are loyal supporters of European political choices as the only possible way forward for Italy
 “O sono diventate filantrope le banche, o sono gli **euroinomani** del ‘ci vuole più Europa’ a fare, volenti oppure no, gli interessi della finanza che sta uccidendo il lavoro e i diritti sociali in nome del ‘fiscal compact’ e del vangelo della competitività.”¹³
 ‘Either the banks have become philanthropists, or it is the “more-Europe” **euro-addicts** who, like it or not, are serving the interests of finance. This finance is killing jobs and social rights in the name of the “fiscal compact” and the gospel of competitiveness.’

In *gretini* (33), wordplay serves the purposes of irony.

- (33) *gretini*.N/A /gre'ti.ni/ (2019) < *Gret(a)*.N_{PR} (*Thunberg*) /gre.ta/ x (*c*)*retini*.N/A /kre'ti.ni/ ‘idiots, imbeciles’, i.e. derogatory term to label all those activists or anyone who speaks out on the issue of the global climate crisis, usually to minimize its severity
 “Visto che questi **gretini** non hanno saputo dare una risposta, a qualcuno è venuto in mente di dire che non è vero che nel 1650 c’era la piccola era glaciale, cosa che invece è certificata anche da dipinti che ritraggono il Tamigi ghiacciato o pattinatori che pattinavano sulla laguna di Venezia.”¹⁴
 ‘As these **gretini** [naïve followers of Greta Thunberg] could not provide an answer, someone suggested that the Little Ice Age did not occur in 1650. nevertheless, the Little Ice Age did happen, as can be seen from paintings of the frozen River Thames and of skaters on the Venice lagoon.’

Paronymy (Ronneberger-Sibold 2010) entails substitution or addition of phonological material that is mapped from the source word to the contour blend. In par-

¹² Italian Trends (9 April 2016): https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/politica/16_aprile_08/elezioni-guido-bertolaso-resiste-forza-italia-si-spacca-due-e9292b0e-fdb5-11e5-820b-500d9d51558a.shtml.

¹³ Italian Trends (23 January 2016): <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2016/01/23/unione-europea-quando-i-finanziamenti-arrivano-da-goldman-sachs/2399947/>.

¹⁴ Italian Trends (19 March 2019): <https://www.agenziagiornalisticaopinione.it/opinionews/rcc-clima-professore-franco-battaglia-riscaldamento-globale-una-colossale-gretinata-la-piccola-greta-e-una-minorenne-sfruttata-da-maggiorenni/>.

ticular, *Aledanno* (30) exhibits phonemic substitution of the bilabial nasal /m/ with a voiced dental stop /d/; paronymy involves a larger phonological segment in *Bertolesso* (example (15), section 2.3), and substitution of the voiceless velar stop /k/ with a voiced one /g/ in *gretini* (33). Instead, *euroinomane* (32) exemplifies rather an addition, as the splinter *euro* (or the combining form *euro-*) contributes to the blend adding a labial-velar glide /w/ that is absent in the first source word (i.e. *eroinomane*). In all four cases, the result are clever puns, cunningly employed to criticize and / or ridicule ideologically distant individuals and groups.

In (30), *Aledanno* ‘Alemanno the Damage Maker’ can be seen as exhibiting a cause-effect and / or a metaphorical relationship between constituents; the negative evaluative *danno* ‘damage’ is the defining trait of his government. The co-text encourages us to understand *Aledanno*, originally expressing negativity (however mitigated through humorous wordplay), as a mitigated form of negative irony, or even more positively: compared to Virginia Raggi’s government of Rome, Alemanno was a good Mayor. Like *Alfetta* ((9); section 4.1), then, *Aledanno* appears to exemplify some kind of dynamic evolution, in the sense of the blend taking on positive connotation.

In (31), Guido Bertolaso is renamed *Bertolesso* by members of his political coalition (the right-wing moderates of *Forza Italia*). This choice is far from being random semantically and phonologically. *Lesso* ‘boiled; boiled meat’, meaning ‘exhausted’ as well as ‘useless, numb’ (section 2.2) is closer than other words (e.g. *bollito* ‘exhausted’ and therefore ‘useless, numb’) to the family name *Bertolaso*, so that both source words may remain still transparent (Gries 2004).¹⁵ While ludic, *Bertolesso* is created and used to mock, ridicule and isolate Bertolaso from his own in-group.

Conversely, the contour blends *euroinomane* and *gretini* do not refer to single persons, but rather to socio-political groups or movements. Specifically, *euroinomane* (32), based on an argument compound with *Europe* as the object of addiction, is consciously combines hyperbole and metaphor to harshly criticize those Italian politicians and citizens who firmly believe in Italy as a member-state of Europe and are keen to align with the economic policies of the European Union, including the Treaty on Stability. EU supporters are likened to addicts, while banks represent the defining trait of Europe, an entity ruled by technocrats interested in finance and for their own benefits.

Gretini.N.PL (33) is another expression of negativity. It is used by ideologically distant critics of the climate activist Greta Thunberg to discredit her views and

¹⁵ We have to deduce then that *Bertobollito.N.PR*, which plays on alliteration, would not have been a successful blend.

supporters. The noun can be analyzed as the outcome of personal and participant *-ino* ‘-ist’ derivation operating on the given name *Greta*, meaning ‘supporter of N_{PR}’ and ‘adherent to Greta Thunberg’s views’ based on a PERSON FOR (SALIENT) PROPERTY metonymy. At the same time, *-ini* is a diminutive (*-ino*.DIM.PL): while it may convey endearment and express appreciation (SMALL IS NICE / GOOD), it profiles age in order to describe Greta’s supporters as generally young; secondly, the metonymy DEFINING PROPERTY FOR PERSON elaborates the metaphorical targets in AGE IS KNOWLEDGE and AGE IS EXPERIENCE to profile lack of experience and substandard knowledge, which involve a negative evaluation. Interpreting *gretini* as an attributive blend of *Gret(a)* (*Thunberg*) and *cretini* ‘idiots’, a dysphemism, further reinforces criticism of the group of mostly teenagers and young adults that have adhered to the ecological beliefs spread by Greta Thunberg. In the eyes of the speaker, those *cretini* are naïve fools and young idiots that have been taken away by false ideals and the wrong values: Gret(in)a’s followers are young idiots. More generally, the PERSON FOR GROUP metonymy extends *gretini* to ridicule all (young) environmentalists in (33), while *gretini* can express negative irony based on incongruity when referring to well-groomed, adult politicians who should know better than to fall for Greta.

Like *gretini*, *Parmabia*.N_{PR} (34) and *Gallarabia*.N_{PR} (35) appear to represent culturally significant keywords, i.e. words coined around culturally sensitive issues (Williams 1976) and, particularly, immigration (see also *accoglione* in (2)). They express negativity towards an ideological target – the out-group of Democrats and other Italians that champion immigration – while at the same time ingratiating members of the in-group. They are formed via local analogy on the model base *Eurabia* (2005), which was popularized in 2005 to designate the far-right, Islamophobic conspiracy theory that Europe is undergoing Islamization / Arabization.

In Italian, toponyms are formed based on coordinate compounds, e.g. *Eurasia* < *Eur(opa)* x *Asia*, to mimic iconically territorial unions like *Calexico* (< *Cal(ifornia)* x (*M*)*exico*) or *Senegambia* (< *Senega(l)* x *Gambia*) (Thornton 1993: 150). *Eurabia*, *Parmabia* and *Gallarabia*, however, are creative names of real places, with enriched meaning descriptions. Since conspiracy theories are hyperbolic by definition, hyperbole maximizes the size and presence of Arabia in Europe and other geographical places. *Arabia* and *Europa* refer metonymically to their people (COUNTRY FOR PEOPLE), religions and associated values and culture (COUNTRY FOR SALIENT TRAIT / PROPERTY) as well as actions. Juxtaposition highlights a contrast relationship between constituents, with Arabia progressively occupying, and not joining Europe, based on metaphors that conceptualize Islam, a religion, as an enemy army and immigration as war. Following the pattern [N_{PR1}-(Ar)*abia*N_{PR2}]N_{PR}

<> ‘N_{PR2} with proper function of occupying N_{PR1}’, *Parma* and *Gallarate* – towns in affluent northern Italy that have seen significant immigration – are under attack.

- (34) *Parmabia*.N_{PR} (2019) /par'ma.bja/ < *Parm*a.N_{PR1} /'par.ma/ x | (*Eur*)abia.N_{PR2} /ew'ra.bja/ | (*Ar*)abia.N_{PR2} /a'ra.bja/, i.e. Parma undergoing a process of Islamisation
 “L’audace Oriana Fallaci, definì l’Europa con l’appellativo di ‘Eurabia’, noi possiamo già chiamare la nostra Parma **Parmabia**? Speriamo di no perché noi non vogliamo islamizzare l’Italia e le nostre città.”¹⁶
 ‘Oriana Fallaci boldly called Europe “Eurabia”; can we call our Parma **Parmabia** yet? We hope not, as we do not want Italy and our cities to become Islamicized.’
- (35) *Gallarabia*.N_{PR} (2016) /gal.la'ra.bja/ < *Gallara*(te).N_{PR} /gal.la'ra.te/ x | (*Eur*)abia.N_{PR2} /ew'ra.bja/ | *Arabia*.N_{PR1} /a'ra.bja/ i.e. Gallarate undergoing a process of Islamisation
 “So bene che invece la sinistra sta raccontando ai varesini che la città fa schifo, ma sono sicuro che non vi farete ingannare. [...] Gallarate: una città che dopo cinque anni di amministrazione PD è ormai nota a tutti come **Gallarabia**, dove degrado, immigrazione incontrollata, insicurezza e cementificazioni selvagge non sono l’eccezione, ma la norma del tessuto urbano.”¹⁷
 ‘I know full well that the left is telling Varese residents that their city is damned awful, but I’m sure you won’t be fooled. [...] After five years under the Democrats, Gallarate is now known to everyone as **Gallarabia** – where decay, uncontrolled immigration, insecurity, and reckless concrete jungles are the norm.’

5 Conclusions

The present paper offered a qualitative study of a restricted set of lexical blends and of lexemes formed with the combining forms *-poli*, *-gate*, *-nomics* and *-stan* in Italian. Reflecting the need for politics and the news to designate new concepts, facts of the day and more generally developments in culture and the world, but also to express opinions and attitudes, we looked into complex nominals as proper names and appellative nouns, often nonce formation or short-lived items. In politics and journalese, we have seen, the composite structure is coined with special attention to description and therefore to certain extra-linguistic facts. Extending Tokovski’s (2020) work on humor to cover negative evaluation and irony, which play a major part in our data, it is safe to claim that the items under scrutiny serve a primarily social function.

¹⁶ Italian Trends (9 September 2019): <https://www.parmatoday.it/politica/parmabia-no-grazie-6900694.html>.

¹⁷ Italian Trends (22 May 2016): <https://www.laprovinciadivarese.it/insieme-per-un-paese-migliore-chi-non-vota-orrigoni-vota-renzi-234582/>.

Overall, there is a strong preference for highly context-dependent word formations that express negativity towards the target, with third-party orientation. Negative evaluation involves out-group exclusion and disalignment, as the out-group's values, actions and beliefs that are accessed through the referent are challenged, ridiculed and attacked in various ways. On the other hand, negative evaluation can contribute to ingratiation, enhance complicity and work towards associative affiliation, agreement and alignment with shared values – i.e. it is a reliable form of inclusion of like-minded addressees within the particular community.

Regarding word structure, a major source of incongruity and humor is paronymic blending (as against recourse to combining forms that are evaluatively neutral and / or exclude unpredictable modification of the source words). Homonymy, however, is also possible. It pushes the boundaries of wordplay that journalese permits. E.g. *Alfetta* (9) – a nickname for the coalition government formed by *Angelino Alfano* and *Enrico Letta* – mimics the name of a famous Italian sports car.

In general, the less recognizable the source word, the less transparent and the more ludic and humorous the outcome. For wordplay – whose appreciation counts as a form of ingratiation – it is important to note that variation on the semantics of existing schemas or patterns may have humorous effects, as in *Renxit* (14): contrary to formations such as *Italexit*, meaning that 'Italy is willing to leave the EU', *Renxit* describes Matteo Renzi as 'unwilling to leave the government and step down as Prime Minister', and his coalition as 'ready to desert him'. Dysphemism has a reinforcing effect on paronymy, e.g. *lesso* in *Bertolesso* ((13), (31)) and *cretini* in *gretini* (33). In *Bertolesso* 'Bertolaso the useless Numb', humor somehow mitigates group-internal criticism; in *gretini* 'young and naïve supporters of Greta Thunberg', the offence is further aggravated when playing with the diminutive, especially in case the referent are adult politicians. Taboo words and reference to taboo topics contribute significantly towards negative evaluation ((2): *accoglioni* 'pro-immigration assholes') and irony ((30): *Aledanno* 'Alemanno the Damage Maker is not (that) bad (after all)').

Proper names are a priori neutral, which explains classificatory nouns such as *Veltronomics* (13), and the type of negative evaluation or even irony that can only carry over from the combining form ((3): *Berlusconiistan*). However, blends that enter the '[N_{PR1} x N_{PR2}]N_{PR} <> coalition / agreement / compromise' schema, with given name variants, are a case apart: most often negative meanings and even irony only arise when the close relationship between the referents is interpreted as detrimental to one of the parties, given semantico-encyclopaedic knowledge and shared common ground. Thus, negative irony in *Walteroni* 'unlikely coalition

between Walter Veltroni's Democrats and Silvio Berlusconi's conservative party' arises via analogy with *Dalemoni* 'Massimo D'Alema's dealings with Berlusconi', seen as 'a monster' that had already proven especially detrimental to Massimo D'Alema (28). Or, in *Prodinotti* < (*Romano*) *Prodi* x (*Fausto*) (*Bert*)*inotti* (27) and *Berluscotti* < (*Silvio*) *Berlusco*(n)*i* x (*Fausto*) *Ber*(tin)*otti* (1), the target of irony are Fausto Bertinotti and his Communist Party: with his no-confidence vote to Romano Prodi's ruling coalition, of which he has a member, Fausto Bertinotti unwittingly assisted Berlusconi's coalition in running a second term.

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