

Representations of Italian Populism and Immigration on Facebook. A Comparison of the Posts by Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini (2014-2018).

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The investigation explores the representations of Italian populism and immigration on social media. Although social media are the preferred vehicle of populist communication, their role has only begun to be studied in recent years. We are part of this new attention by focusing on both communication and its impact on followers of two populist leaders, the politically transversal oriented Luigi Di Maio, and the far-right oriented Matteo Salvini. In line with the theory of social representations (SR), our starting point is that language is opaque and capable of promoting and directing inferences through specific linguistic markers that widely use the emotional register to make communication more effective. Our study focuses on how the populism and immigration issues are represented on Facebook by the two populist leaders. We chose to treat the two representations at the same time because of the strong connection that binds them. The posts of two leaders, general and immigration-focused, were compared for their language patterns, emotional characterization, and followers' approval. The

language used and the topics covered highlighted the coexistence of different representations of populism, which coexist giving a clear signal of widespread forms of cognitive polyphasia. We noticed a greater use of the emotional register in Salvini, compared to Di Maio. In Salvini this register is more accentuated in the posts on immigration, characterized by a negative tone and with the highest rate of popularity among his followers, both compared to generalist posts and compared to Di Maio's posts. The results are discussed with respect to the literature on social representations and their impact at the societal level.

Keywords: Social representations, emotional register, populism, immigration, social media, textual analysis

Social media are recognized as a powerful vehicle for spreading populist ideas. Their logic, based on horizontality and disintermediation, allows populist leaders to interface directly with their followers making these media a communication tool favored by populism. Despite this centrality, social media have become an object of study of populism only in the last few years. We are part of this recent attention, favoring the approach of social representations that have always been sensitive to the role of communication and language (Moscovici, 2001; Moscovici & Marková, 1998). In this perspective, language is seen as a non-neutral and non-transparent tool which, through specific linguistic markers, is able to promote and direct inferences making its function of particular interest for social psychologists.

As for the privileged content of populist ideology, the theme of immigration is a central focus. In the opening chapter of the *Oxford Handbook of Populism*, the editors present an overview of the concept, affirming that in recent years the immigration topic has received a great deal of attention in the literature on populism with an exponential growth of academic publications on the xenophobic tendencies of the populist radical right (Rovira Kaltwasser, Taggart, Ochoa Espejo, & Ostiguy, 2017). But precisely in this regard the editors underline how the radical right is a particular family of populist parties which, however, does not exhaust the variegated world of populism which, in other ways, can be shown not contrary to immigration. We want to take this point of view by presenting an analysis of the communication on Facebook

acted by the two main Italian populist politicians: Luigi Di Maio, leader of the populist, politically transversal, Five Star Movement, and Matteo Salvini, leader of the populist, radical right-wing, League. Due to their different ideological-cultural orientations, in our analysis we have brought attention both to their communication in general and, comparatively, to that centered on immigration with the aim of exploring the possible different modulation of their speeches. In fact, the two themes are closely related to each other making it legitimate to study them simultaneously. In this way, we will propose a double study: on the two forms of populism and on their way of interrelating with the immigration issue, focusing at the same time on the reactions stimulated in their followers. We will thus see how populism and immigration are the subject of representations functional to the political interest of each of the two leaders who modulate the emotional register differently to get in tune with their followers. These different representations coexist in Italian society giving life to that plurality of perspectives typical of cognitive polyphasia, a distinctive trait of social representations (see Moscovici, 1961/1976; also, Andreouli & Sammut, 2017).

A DEFINITION OF POPULISM

Populism is a phenomenon with increasing popularity in Western democracies. It appears to be characterized by the coexistence of antithetical categories that create a contrast between the people and institutions and between the people and ‘others’—be they elites or specific outgroups. In this way, a polarization is outlined in which the identity of the people is built through dynamics linked, on one hand to the valorization of the ingroup—a pure, good and honest people—and on the other to the stigmatization of the outgroup, politics in general, and the corrupt elites—that is, specific bad and amoral social groups that are perceived to be harmful to the people (Greven, 2016; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). This differentiation / polarization in the research literature has been interpreted within a dynamic that outlines inclusionary and exclusionary populism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013) that are opposed to each other based on different definitions of ‘otherness’. Inclusionary populism, often associated with left-wing parties, conceives the ‘other’ in terms of economic oligarchies, media, and foreign capital, whereas in exclusionary populism, typically linked to right-wing parties, the ‘other’ is composed of immigrants and, more generally, from those who are described as

culturally different (see Caiani & Graziano, 2019). In the literature this possibility to describe populism according to a right- or left-wing orientation has been directly linked to it being a thin ideology (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012): it has a fragmentary and chameleonic nature (Mikucka-Wójtowicz, 2019; Taggart, 2004) which can easily be mixed with ideologies such as those related to political orientation. From this point of view, Italy exemplifies this bifurcation through the various topics surrounding the two main populist forces that ruled Italy from May 2018 to August 2019: the far-right League, led by Matteo Salvini and the politically transversal Five Star Movement, led by Luigi Di Maio.

Populism in Italy and Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric

We are particularly interested in how populism relates to attitudes towards immigrants. This relationship is not accidental, for example the characteristics of populist right-wing thinking make it particularly probable that immigrants will be object of sanctions. According to Roberto Biorcio (2015), Italian populist thought, despite being fundamentally dichotomous and conflictual, is characterized by three lines: anti-politics, anti-immigration, and the defence of the national or local community. Likewise, Bobba and Legnante (2016), in their analysis of Italian populism, recall how it revolves around charismatic leadership, anti-elitist language, and symbolic policies based on inclusion / exclusion dynamics.

More generally, the socio-psychological literature has begun to investigate the different aspects that nourish these dynamics and, in particular, ingroup / outgroup differentiation processes. This literature highlights immigrants as one of the favorite targets of populist rhetoric (Andreouli, Kaposi, & Stenner, 2019; Salmela & von Scheve, 2017; Staerklé & Green, 2018). This rhetoric identifies immigrants as an outgroup that must be fought; they are a source of insecurity and a cause of social unease, increasingly evoked in order to spread fear. In response, populist leaders promote themselves in the reassuring role of facing the immigration threat through containment and repressive policies.

This creates a situation that feeds dissatisfaction, resentment, and discontent, which are then directed towards immigrants. In Italy, this dynamic is ridden by Salvini, who led the government along with the other populist leader, Di Maio, until August 2019. Although Di Maio shares Salvini's anti-immigrant policy, he does not seem to get involved with the extremism

evoked by Salvini, who in the second half of the last year under observation was his government ally. This differentiation between the two leaders has its origin in the different identities of the two populist forces, the League and the Five Star Movement. The League, an openly right-wing party, shows a strong nationalist and xenophobic tendency. On the other hand, the Five Star Movement appears to be openly conflicted towards both the economic and media elites while remaining a transversal force that has received wide support even among the electorate of Democratic Party (PD), the largest party of the Italian left (see Bobba & Legnante, 2016; Pirro, 2018). These differences partly illustrate the distinction highlighted by some scholars (see also Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017) for which right-wing populists would ostracize specific groups defined as enemies, whereas left-wing populists would above all attack the economic elite.

Social Media and Populism

As Mazzoleni and Bracciale (2018) note, in recent years research has begun to shift its interest from the content of populist ideology to how it is communicated through social and traditional media. A hybrid mass-media environment has thus emerged that has given rise to a mediatized populism (Mazzoleni, 2014), showing a sort of elective affinity between social media and populism (Gerbaudo, 2018), and focuses strongly on those processes of interactivity, disintermediation, and immediacy that have promoted the affirmation of these media in populist communication (Bobba, 2019). The affinity between social media and populism would arise from the role acquired by these media that lend themselves to giving voice to the common people (Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017). On the one hand, the very design of social media, seen as platforms completely open to the free expression of ordinary people, allows populist movements to channel popular anger against what is denounced as the ‘pro-establishment’ bias of the mainstream media. The theme of anger on social media has led some scholars to talk about ‘angry populist’. It shows the prevalence of an emotional regime (Reddy, 2001) able to motivate and mobilize an otherwise disenchanting electorate (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018). In this way “social media contribute to dramatizing populist communication because they are platforms suited to producing emotional, controversial, even violent contents typical of much populist activism.” (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018, p. 3).

Within this emotional regime, also known in the literature as emotionalized blame attribution (Hameleers et al., 2017, 2018), collective rituals were born in which anger took on the role of a destructive force. Social media has thus shown itself to be a privileged terrain in which to conduct a battle through a targeted use of language which, thanks to an extremely simplified syntax, can be utilized for divisive and discriminatory purposes, as well as for cohesion and inclusion. Thus, two types of populism are faced, the conservative populism that seeks more leadership and less participation, and the progressive populism that wants more participation and less leadership (Salgado & Stavrakakis, 2019).

Compared to the Italian case and to the relationship between Internet-driven populism, Cavazza and colleagues note that “the network revolution freed and put into circulation individual moods that previously did not come out of the private sphere” (Cavazza, Colloca, Corbetta, & Roccato, 2018, p. 209 [our translation]). These moods have been nourished by populist leaders, according to communicative styles and different linguistic choices that our research aims to explore, filling a gap in the psycho-social literature. This gap has shown to underestimate the role of the communicative aspects of populism that until a few years ago were unexplored or often ignored (see Aalberg & De Vreese, 2016; but also Moffitt, 2016). On the other hand, the socio-psychological perspective has much to say about the basic dynamics of the Manichean outlook of populism (Bobba & Roncarolo, 2018) based on the friend / enemy opposition clearly attributable to the aforementioned ingroup / outgroup dynamic: the first, the ingroup-we/us-valued, the second, the outgroup-they/them-denigrated and stigmatized. In this last case, the outgroup includes immigrants in addition to all individuals outside ‘the people’.

On the appeal to immigrants in particular, the research highlighted the capacity of this theme to gather a broad consensus among social media users. For example, Bobba and Roncarolo (2018) showed how the messages published on Facebook by the main Italian political leaders with references to immigrants receive the highest number of likes. Another aspect, linked to the emotional dimension, finds that emotionalized-style messages affect their likeability (Bobba, 2019). This result appears to be consistent with what was experimentally highlighted by Hameleers and Schmuck (2017), according to which the emotional register would prove particularly effective in terms of the persuasiveness of the populist message.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The study is part of a broad research program interested in representations of populism analyzed both in the common sense (i.e., through specific questionnaires addressed to Italian citizens), the communication of populist leaders, and in the relative reactions of their followers. These representations are analyzed through multiple triangulation models that allow us to preserve the complexity of the object of investigation according to a perspective particularly developed by the theory of social representations (Caillaud & Flick, 2016; Flick, Foster, & Caillaud, 2015; Caillaud et al., 2019). In our case, we have triangulated various theoretical constructs. For example, in the questionnaires we referred to the theory of social representations, placed in a superordinate role and triangulated with other constructs such as the quest for significance, need for cognitive closure, and collective narcissism, as possible psycho-social antecedents of populist attitudes and representations. With regards to the triangulation of data and methods, the diversified use of the sources of the various studies (questionnaires to lay people and texts of political communication by populist leaders) made it possible to collect textual data (e.g., associations with words-stimuli, or texts of political leaders' posts) and extra-textual (e.g., those relating to different scales, or to specific categorical variables), both elaborated with differential methodologies.

In the present study, from the theoretical point of view, we started from the assumption, typical of studies on social representations, of the opacity of language and its close correlation with values, ideologies, and power relations (Moscovici, 2001; Moscovici & Marková, 1998). In this context, we hypothesize that social actors use language strategically, manipulating specific linguistic markers, in order to promote inferences and selectively direct the interlocutor's attention (Sensales, Areni, & Baldner, 2018).

A second reference is to the polemical representations (Moscovici, 1988, see also Sammut et al., 2015). They concern controversial aspects on which a social group constructs representations in competition with those of other social groups. On the basis of our results, in the discussion section, we will explore the possibility of tracing Salvini's representations of populism and immigration to this type of representations.

A third reference is to the role of emotions. In a situation of social and economic crisis, the cause of profound psychological malaise, populism emerges as a response capable of mobilizing people in search of a positive identity through emotional appeals that enhance the

ingroup (Kruglanski, Molinario, & Sensales, 2021). At the same time, in populist narrative, confining the representations of the immigrant to the negative world of ‘Otherness’ protects the ingroup with a shift of unwanted emotions towards an outgroup seen as distant and to be stigmatized. In this way, the classical dynamic is outlined, functional to the construction of the SR, which through positive / negative emotional appeals satisfies the interests of specific groups while preserving their stability and cohesion. With respect to this dynamic, studies on social representations are increasingly centred on the role of emotions (see Caillaud et al., 2016; and also, Joffe & Lee, 2004; Eiguren, Idoiaga, Berasategi, & Picaza, 2021), stimulating a reflection that involved research on the social representations of immigration (Mannarini et al., 2020; De Rosa et al., 2021). In light of these findings, we will join this promising line of research by focusing on the role of emotions in the construction of representations of both populism in general and immigration in particular.

Finally, on a methodological level in our investigation we will refer to a critical research tradition that integrates both quantitative corpus linguistic analysis and qualitative contextual analysis in the exploration of political communication (Sensales, Areni, & Giuliano, 2017). Alongside this tradition, an approach that analyzes language to explore social and psychological processes through computerized text analysis has been increasingly affirmed in mainstream social psychology, helping to “reveal motivations, thinking styles, social relationships, and personalities” (Pennebaker, 2017, p. 101). In this last perspective there are also several studies that have been conducted on political communication (e.g., Boyd & Pennebaker, 2015; Sterling, Jost, & Bonneau, 2020). In our case, we treasured the two-research view – critical and mainstream - to apply quantitative approach to big data, extrapolated by Facebook posts analysed with textual automatic software, in combination with an attention towards the context in which specific linguistic markers were used. In this way we will be able to concentrate both on the processes, on the contents, and on the emotional and rhetorical formats of communication, according to an intertwining that the social representations theory assumes to be constitutive in the analysis of social objects.

Objectives

Starting from this framework, our exploratory study analyzes the lexicon used on Facebook from Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini, comparatively in the general and immigration focused posts, over a five-year period (from 2014 to 2018).

Operationally, our descriptive analyses will cover: 1) the trend of two kinds of posts published in this period; 2) the frequency of likes, comments, and shares to highlight if there is a greater consensus of followers on general or immigration posts; 3) the most frequent words characterizing the two types of posts; 4) the presence of a language linked to affective processes and emotional expressions. In this regard, we will pay attention to positive/negative assessments in both type of posts. We also will focus on the role of negative emotions in the narrative about immigration, hypothesizing that in Salvinian anti-immigration populism the negative emotions may have a centrality that receives a broad consensus of their own base, unlike what should happen for the populism of Di Maio, less focused on the immigration issues and less oriented to using the negative emotional tone in general; 5) the reference to a rhetoric that uses specific markers of informal anti-elitist language, according to that ‘low’ register of communication, typical of populism (cfr. Ostinguy, 2017; Bobba & Legnante, 2016), and more in tune with its users.

METHODOLOGY

Material Under Analysis

Through Facebook API, data have been extracted from both the official pages of two leaders and organized as follows. From 2014 to 2018, we retrieved 3125 posts by Di Maio and 3163 by Salvini. Data have been made ready for the text analysis by UTF-8 characters decoding. As seen on Table 1, the frequencies show similar trends for both leaders with a discontinuous course in the first four years, and a clear growth in the fifth and final year.

Table 1

Time Distribution of the Retrieved Posts

| Year | Luigi Di Maio | Matteo Salvini | Total amount |
|------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
|------|---------------|----------------|--------------|

| | | | |
|--------------|------|------|------|
| 2014 | 595 | 597 | 1192 |
| 2015 | 588 | 592 | 1180 |
| 2016 | 595 | 599 | 1194 |
| 2017 | 591 | 595 | 1186 |
| 2018 | 756 | 780 | 1536 |
| Total amount | 3125 | 3163 | 6288 |

Operational Pathway

Firstly, through an automatic key-words exploration, posts have been classified as pertinent, or not, to the topic of immigration. We considered the presence of the following lexical roots to identify whether a post could be classified as immigration-related: "-migr-", "stranier-" (foreigner), "espulsion-" (expulsion), "invasione" (invasion), "profug-" (refugee), "Africa-", "clandestin-", "scafist-" (boatman, people smuggler), "Ong" (NGO), "Diciotti", "Aquarius", "Sea Watch", "Lifeline" (the previous four keywords are names of boats that monitor for migrants), "#portichiusi" (literally, "#closedharbours", a popular hashtag by Salvini), "sbarc-" (landing), "richiedent* asilo" (asylum seeker), "barcon-" (boat). Table 2 shows the frequencies distribution of the posts for each of five years, both in general (without immigration posts) and in the posts focused on immigration. For each leader, the two corpora consist of a partition of the leader sample; namely, they are mutually disjoint sets. At the end of this selection, we collected numerical data in two specific files (for the general corpus and for the immigration corpus), while textual data were transferred in two lexical files (always for the two corpora).

RESULTS

Extra-textual Data

Comparative trends in frequencies of posts of Di Maio and Salvini, 2014-2018.

Table 2

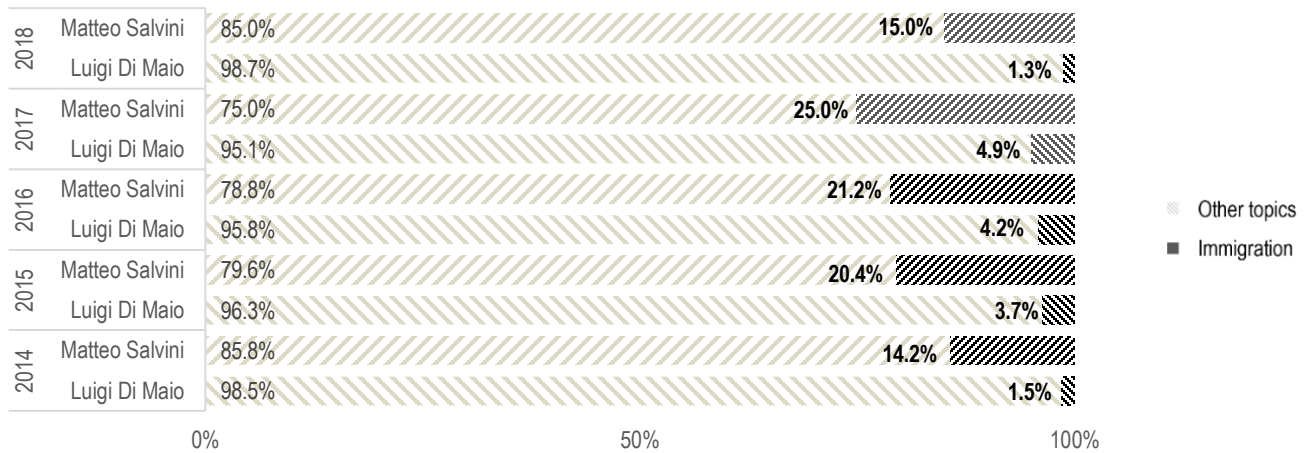
Post Distribution Across Leaders

| Related to Immigration | Frequencies | Di Maio | | Salvini | | Total |
|------------------------|-------------|----------|-------|----------|---------|-------|
| | | | | | | |
| No | Observed | 3030 | | 2564 | | 5594 |
| | Expected | (2780.1) | | (2813.9) | | |
| | Column | | 96.4% | | 81.1% | |
| Yes | Observed | 95 | | 599 | | 694 |
| | Expected | (344.9) | | (349.1) | | |
| | Column | | 3.6% | | 18.9% | |
| Total | | 3125 | 100% | 3163 | 100.00% | 6288 |

Note. Critical χ^2 (df= 1, .001) =10.8; $\chi^2 = 403.0$

Table 2 shows how the posts are distributed across the subsets. The imbalance between the two leaders in how they face the topic of immigration over Facebook is evident. While Di Maio spends a limited amount of messages about the topic (95 observed cases against 345 expected), Salvini shows a huge interest in immigration topic (599 observed cases against 349 expected). Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of posts focused on immigration. The first observation concerns the continuous growth of the topic in the first four years and the clear decline in the last year. The second remark refers to the greater salience of the “immigration” subject for Salvini compared to Di Maio.

Figure. 1.
Proportion of Immigration-centric Facebook posts by Salvini and Di Maio.



Statistics for likes, comments, shares and engagement to the posts of Di Maio and Salvini.

With the aim to examine the popularity of the posts we analyzed the average amount of *likes*, *comments*, and *shares* comparatively for both the general corpus and for the immigration subset, both for Di Maio and Salvini. We also show a synthetic *engagement* index, computed as sum of *comments*, *shares*, and *reactions* (see Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018; Di Cicco & Sensales, 2019). *Reactions* were introduced by Facebook in 2016 and represent an extension of the possible feedback that users could leave since that time. In fact, where users could just *like*, *comment*, or *share* a message, from 2016 onwards it is possible to specify if one’s own reaction is about a sense of *love*, *ridicule*, *awe*, *sadness*, or *anger*. For this reason, our *engagement* index is slightly larger than the simple summation of the three addends above. Table 3 illustrates these results, showing in general the popularity of the immigration issue; it certifies higher averages relative to their general posts in the three indicators for both leaders; this is particularly evident for the *shares*.

Table 3.
Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini: *t*-Statistics for General* / Immigration Comparison of the Means

| Di Maio | Absolute values | | Mean | | St.Dev | | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|----------|-----------------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|----------|
| | General* | Immigr. | General* | Immigr. | General* | Immigr. | | |
| Likes | 26113303 | 966488 | 8618.3 | 10173.6 | 11138.0 | 11396.8 | -1.31 | .14 |
| Comments | 6035190 | 170407 | 1991.8 | 1793.8 | 5948.3 | 4450.0 | .42 | .42 |
| Shares | 14536401 | 740087 | 4797.5 | 7790.4 | 11986.3 | 12552.4 | -2.29 | .01 |
| Engagem. | 49067576 | 1925092 | 16193.9 | 20264.1 | 28218.9 | 26546.8 | -1.47 | .15 |

| Salvini | Absolute values | | Mean | | St.Dev | | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---------|-----------------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|----------|
| | General* | Immigr. | General* | Immigr. | General* | Immigr. | | |
| | 27731427 | 9011251 | 10815.7 | 15043.8 | 13204.2 | 21200.4 | -4.67 | <.01 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|------|
| Likes | | | | | | | | |
| Comments | 7597171 | 2445984 | 2963.0 | 4083.4 | 5082.7 | 11728.8 | -2.29 | <.01 |
| Shares | 12076947 | 6527055 | 4710.2 | 10896.6 | 14298.5 | 26354.8 | -5.56 | <.01 |
| Engagem. | 50126150 | 19011533 | 19550.0 | 31738.8 | 29405.2 | 52502.3 | -5.48 | <.01 |

*does not include Immigration posts

The only exception for this trend is the average for the *comments* to Di Maio posts, which is lower than in the general corpus. In particular, we can note how Salvini gains the highest values in immigration-oriented messages. In fact, while Di Maio's followers show a smaller average of *engagement*, Salvini's followers respond enthusiastically. The comparison between means for each leader shows how for Di Maio *shares* is the only indicator whose mean differs by a significant amount between the general corpus and the immigration corpus ($t = -2.29, p = .01$). Conversely, each of the indicators for Salvini shows a significant variation across the partitions: all the values are significantly higher in the immigration case, namely for *likes* ($t = -4.67, p = <.01$), *comments* ($t = -2.29, p = <.01$), *shares* ($t = -5.56, p = <.01$), *engagement* ($t = -5.48, p = <.01$). Lastly, comparing the results between the two leaders we can see means higher in Salvini than Di Maio for *like*, *comments* and *engagement*, statistically significant in the general case ($t = -6.658; -6.585; -4.333; p < .01$), but not in the immigration case, despite the same trend. Different is the trend for the *shares*, with Di Maio higher than Salvini in general posts and lower in the immigration posts, but without statistical significance.

Textual Data

Lexico Analysis

With the Lexico3 statistical package (Salem, Lamaille, Martinez, & Fleury, 2003) we analysed the textual data in order to detect the most frequent words.

The most frequent words

The exploration includes the most frequently used words, in both the general and subset corpora, in order to further describe the lexical patterns across topic and leader. Table 4 shows how the lexical density is higher in the immigration corpus than in general corpus, both for Di Maio and for Salvini. The result indicates the lexical richness of the immigration corpus even if this trend is mitigated by the rule for which the relationship between words and occurrences tends to decrease with the size of the corpus. Furthermore, within the immigration corpus there are higher percentages of hapax (i.e., words with frequency one) relative to the general corpus, pointing in

this way to a greater linguistic dispersion of the immigration vocabulary compared to the general posts.

Table 4.
Lexico3 Output. Lexical Metrics of the Different Corpora Counted in the Analysis

| Corpus | Partition | Posts | Occurrences (N) | Words (V) | hapax | Lexical density (V/N)*100 | %hapax |
|----------------|-------------|-------|-----------------|-----------|-------|---------------------------|--------|
| Luigi Di Maio | General* | 3030 | 275770 | 21096 | 10017 | 7.6% | 47.5% |
| | Immigration | 95 | 25631 | 5468 | 3214 | 21.3% | 58.8% |
| Matteo Salvini | General* | 2564 | 69242 | 9123 | 4865 | 13.2% | 53.3% |
| | Immigration | 599 | 23991 | 4663 | 2666 | 19.4% | 57.2% |

*does not include Immigration posts

The Word clouds

With the software WordArt we built the word clouds that corresponded to Di Maio and Salvini's posts in the general and immigration corpora. In the clouds the different size of each word is related to its frequency. The clouds are composed by the first 100 most frequent words. Terms between asterisks (*) are made up by lemmatization grouping (see Appendix in the Supplementary materials for the tables with the first 100 most frequent words for general and immigration posts).

Figures 2 and 3 show the major differences in the vocabulary of Di Maio present in the general corpus compared to the immigration corpus (see Tables 1 and 2 of Appendix in Supplementary Materials for the percentage frequency of the most frequent words cited for each of the word clouds). In Figure 2 we can observe the reiteration of the reference to the ingroup with the presence of <5 Star Movement> and both the first singular pronominal/possessive forms <I have>, <me>, <my>, <I>, and <I am>; as well as the first plural pronominal/possessive forms <Our>, <We have>, <We are>, <We>, <We see>, <We want>, <We must>. A high frequency is gained by the reference to <citizen>, obtained by grouping together <citizen> <citizens> and <citizenship>, all words typical of the Five Star rhetoric. The outgroup is highly evoked by the pronominal/adjective forms <they are>, <they / their>, < they will be >, <they

do>, and by the recall to the antagonistic political party <PD> (Democratic Party) and its party leader, <Renzi>. There are also different clear links to the political institutions with the words <law>, <Parliament> (obtained by grouping together <Parliament>, <parliamentary> and <MPs>), <government>, <Mayor>, <politics>, <President>, <Chamber>, <Senate>, <Deputies>, <Minister>. The economic dimension is evoked by the word <Euro>, and <money>. The populist sovereign ideology is present in the words <Italy>, and <Italian>.

Figure 2.

The Words Cloud for Di Maio, General Corpus (not including Immigration posts). The Size of the Word is a Function of its Frequency.



Terms between asterisks (*) are made up by lemmatization grouping.

The words cloud of Figure 3, corresponding to immigration, illustrate a higher frequency than the words cloud of general posts, highlighting the sovereign ideology with references to <Italy>, <Country>, <Italian>, and for the ingroup with pronominal/possessive plural forms <our>, <we have>, <We>, <we are>, <we must>. The outgroup is evoked by the words <they are>, <migrants>, <they / their>, <immigration>, <immigrants>, and <they come>, without emotional words. Lastly, the transnational dimension recurs in the words <European>, <Europe> and <EU>.

Figure 3.
The Words Cloud for Di Maio, Immigration Subset. The Size of the Word is a Function of its Frequency.



Terms between asterisks (*) are made up by lemmatization grouping.

In Salvini, we can note different configurations in the words cloud both of general corpus and immigration subset (see Tables 3 and 4 of Appendix in Supplementary Materials for the percentage frequency of the most frequent words cited for each of the word clouds). Firstly, in the general corpus (Figure 4), the recall to the institutional dimension appears peripheral, the reference to the ingroup is strongly marked by the occurrence of <You>, <you are>, <you have> (his own electorate, main target of his online communication). There is a high frequency of the first singular pronominal/possessive forms <Me> / <I> / <My>, and of the first plural pronominal/possessive forms <our> / <we> / <we are>, while the only references to the outgroup are <they are> and <they / their>. However, <Renzi>, a politician of the left-wing outgroup, is more central for Salvini than Di Maio, whereas the <PD> (Democratic Party, left-wing oriented) has similar frequencies than for Di Maio. On the other hand, the words concerning the ingroup are more central than in the words cloud of Di Maio, with the references to <Italian>, <League>, <Italy>, <friend>, <home>, <Milan>, <Bologna>. Finally, similarly to Di Maio, there is the mention of <Euro> and <Europe>.

The language metrics of Table 5 shows how the LIWC analysis concerns slightly more than half of the words present in the posts recognized by the LIWC dictionary. This result greatly limits the heuristic capacity of our analysis and yet can still be useful in identifying systematic trends in the language used by the two leaders, both in general and with respect to the theme of immigration. The first observation is focused on the role of the emotional dimension related to the four categorical variables: “affective processes,” “positive/negative evaluations,” and “feelings.” For Di Maio, in the first three cases, the value in the immigration centred posts are higher than in the general corpus, while for the feelings the value is stable in both groups. For Salvini, the negative evaluations only show higher values in the subset compared to the general corpus, whereas for the other three categorical variables the trend is reversed with higher values in the general corpus compared to the subset. Lastly, for the first three variables Salvini shows higher values than Di Maio.

Table 5
Descriptive Metrics of LIWC Analysis

| Facebook Page Corpora | | Luigi Di Maio | | Matteo Salvini | |
|----------------------------|---|---------------|---------|----------------|---------|
| | | General* | Immigr. | General* | Immigr. |
| Language Metrics | | | | | |
| Dictionary words | | 51.06 | 51.75 | 52.76 | 50.79 |
| Function Words | | | | | |
| Affective processes | (e.g. care, mood, matter) | 2.56 | 2.83 | 4.44 | 3.89 |
| Positive evaluations ** | (e.g. love, harmony, ensure) | 2.18 | 2.30 | 3.98 | 2.69 |
| Negative evaluations ** | (e.g. sad, alert, anger, lose) | 1.76 | 2.04 | 3.03 | 3.41 |
| Feelings | (e.g. trust, solace) | 0.15 | 0.15 | 0.11 | 0.08 |
| Cognitive expressions ** | (e.g. know, derive) | 9.71 | 10.44 | 9.48 | 9.41 |
| Past focus | (e.g. was, were, had) | 1.32 | 1.23 | 0.89 | 0.70 |
| Present focus | (e.g. is, have, does) | 6.45 | 6.46 | 6.47 | 6.00 |
| Future focus | (e.g. will + ...) | 0.51 | 0.42 | 0.33 | 0.31 |
| Inclusion | (e.g. also, within, this/ these) | 1.67 | 1.57 | 1.66 | 1.67 |
| Exclusion | (e.g. otherwise, rather than, that/those) | 3.35 | 3.98 | 3.12 | 3.20 |
| Question marks | ? | 0.25 | 0.38 | 1.43 | 1.45 |
| Exclamation marks | ! | 0.55 | 0.16 | 3.99 | 3.11 |

Note: Values are expressed as percentages

*doesn't include Immigration posts; ** obtained by grouping original LIWC categories

For cognitive expressions there is little variation, both in the two sets of data for each leader, and in comparison, to the two leaders. Related to the temporal focus, we can observe the salience of the present focus, always higher for Di Maio than Salvini, and the very low values for the future focus. Meanwhile, the past focus presents a slightly higher value than the future focus, following a trend in which the subset presents lower values than the general corpus. For inclusion/exclusion processes the results show little variation related to inclusion processes between the two groups for each leader, as well as between the two leaders. While for the exclusion processes the values are slightly higher in the subset respect to general corpus for both leaders, with Di Maio surprisingly showing higher values in both sets of data in respect to Salvini. Lastly for “informal speech” in general we can note that markers feature more Salvini than Di Maio. We can also observe that the “question marks” are more present in the subset, in relation to the general corpus, for both leaders, while for the “exclamation marks” the trend is reversed with higher frequencies in the general corpus in comparison to the subset.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our psycho-social linguistic exploration, framed in the tradition of social representations, has proved to be a powerful tool to highlight some aspects that differentially characterize the social media communication of two populist leaders, both in terms of content, processes, rhetorical format, linguistic choices, and emotional register. In many respects, our analysis confirms what has been stated in the literature on the polarized, fragmented, and differentiated characterization of populism that has led many scholars to speak in the plural form of populism(s), underling its profile of a thin ideology differentially modulated and often grafted on strong ideologies (Mikucka-Wójtowicz, 2019; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Taggart, 2004). From the perspective of social representations theory, this variety of populisms highlights a cognitive polyphasia that shows the coexistence of different narratives of the same object (Moscovici, 1961/1976; cfr. anche Andreouli & Sammut, 2017), each functional to the interests of a specific group.

Thus, for example, the representations of populism constructed by Salvini appear to be characterized in general by elements of radicality and polarization which are expressed through the language of feelings evoked from the appellative "friends" used to speak to one's own people. In the characteristic words of Salvinian communication, this type of populism clearly reveals the link with a sovereign, securitarian exclusionary right-wing ideology, in which the "otherness" to be fought are immigrants, but also Roma people, together with the major political antagonist Renzi, leader of the center-left, and with a Europe also linked to the single currency; while the classic workhorses of the League linked to taxes and fiscal policies in general are part of the identitarian elements together with the references to their own political force, to the "Country", the "Italians" and "Italy", present at the same time as the referral to local realities concentrated in the North of Italy (i.e., the traditional stronghold of the League). This last aspect shows how the leader's effort to go beyond regional concerns to outline a national party still appears peripheral in his communication, aimed rather at enhancing the hard core of his electoral settlement. Finally, Salvini's representations of populism show a clear reference to a charismatic and personalized leadership that is expressed through a preference for the pronominal form "I".

The representations of populism outlined by Di Maio highlight a strong ingroup / outgroup differentiation, evoked in the use of the pronominal forms we-our / they-their-them. In this dynamic, while the "we" is clearly referred to the Five Star Movement, but also in part to "Italy" and the "Italians", the "them" is anchored to the political opponents of the PD and their leader Renzi, as well as to Europe, to the various places of the Italian institutions and to the banks. The latter are part of those economic oligarchies considered one of the main enemies of a more leftist populism. Apart from this mention, they are somewhat a-ideological representations in which a language of feelings is also absent. The same reference to the people is accompanied by that to "citizens". The central aspects of the representations of populism then seem to unfold along a sort of repeated self-celebration of one's own electoral successes, both political and administrative. One of the battle horses of the Five Star Movement remains that linked to the fight against corruption. The reference to the different places in central and southern Italy, where the electoral success of the Movement was more evident, is the other aspect characterizing the construction of these representations. Finally, it is a populism that favours a communitarian vision of leadership, even if it does not disdain the personalistic one. These two types of representations face each other and coexist in a plurality of perspectives just

described, becoming a clear example of cognitive polyphasia that acts primarily at the societal level.

Even with respect to the use of the emotional register, a variegated use is highlighted. Thus, both leaders' representations of populism generally show emotional elements, but these are modulated differently. In Salvini's general posts the emotions play a driving role, more than in Di Maio, whose populism appears less emotional, more nuanced on the immigration issue and more oriented towards other issues, in correspondence with its political transversality. Furthermore, as we have assumed in Salvini's representations of immigration this emotional register has a completely negative declination, playing a cohesive role against an alterity constructed as threatening. As Mannarini, Salvatore, and Veltri (2020, p.9) note, "making the other an enemy strengthens the sense of belonging, thus restoring identity and membership, along with safety and gratification [according to] a broader all-encompassing dynamic of identity-otherness."

There are several studies in the field of social representations that have shown the role of collective emotions activated as a dynamic response to a perceived threat (see for example Caillaud, Bonnot, Ratiu, & Krauth-Gruber, 2016). This response is also actualized thanks to the use of stereotypes, recalled as a form of implicit knowledge and considered as exempting cognitions that allow one to escape the guilt caused by negative emotions. But Salvini's communication strategy, with a high rate of negative emotionality against migrants, allows a further leap that leads to a normalization of the hate words that bypasses feelings of guilt and makes negative stereotypes towards otherness legitimate. In this way, there is a societal change, the results of which are still to be studied, which modifies the rules of norms and social desirability: what previously seemed to contrast these rules, leading to masking one's negative emotions, now becomes something to be exhibited without shame because it is cleared through customs explicitly by their political leader. This process is amplified by social media, whose logic allows the formation of strongly self-referential groups with a deistic relationship with their leader which leads to a radicalization of the dynamics of ingroup / outgroup differentiation particularly salient for populist ideology. It is no coincidence that a sort of elective affinity between social media and populism is underlined in the literature (Gerbaudo, 2018). In this way in the communication via social media of Di Maio and Salvini we find an example of that self-other relationship considered by Moscovici as constitutive of SRs and of the ways in which

meanings are developed, maintained and transformed (see Batel & Castro, 2018; Moscovici, 1972, 1988).

Di Maio and Salvini communicate via Facebook with their followers according to a trend that remains stable over the first four years and shows an upward surge in 2018. In this period the two leaders build and disseminate SRs of populism and immigration that present strong elements of differentiation both in terms of post and content production, stimulating specific reactions in their followers. Concerning the differences between the two leaders, the most important is the amount of immigration-centred posts, with Salvini more attentive to communicate about this issue than Di Maio. Furthermore, our data underline how Salvini gains the highest consents in this kind of posts, both with respect to Di Maio and to the general corpus of posts. These findings confirm what was stated in the literature about the anti-immigrant vocation of right-wing populism (Andreouli, Kaposi, & Stenner, 2019; Salmela & von Scheve, 2017; Staerklé & Green, 2018) indicating a perfect synchrony between Salvini and his followers, already highlighted in previous studies (Bobba & Roncarolo, 2018).

With regard to this topic, we can make another observation concerning the steadily growing trend of posts in the first four years and the sudden unexpected drop in 2018. The last year's drop is unexpected because it coincides with the exacerbation of anti-immigrant policies conducted throughout the second half of 2018 by Matteo Salvini as Interior Minister. These policies have played a central role in Salvini's mass media communication, which evidently, as leader of a government party, had many more media platforms on which to deal with the topic, which thus could have reduced the importance of social media. In this regard, Salvini is considered to be the most important political proponent of close integration between the media. This integration avoids the risk of self-reference through a dialogue between television, network, and physical territory (according to the acronym TRT- T [television] R [*rete*-network] T [territory]) as a characteristic of its communication strategy (Diamanti & Pregliasco, 2019). On the other hand, Salvini in previous years as leader of a right-wing party to the opposition, had made immigration a workhorse against a left accused of having promoted policies that did not stem the migratory phenomena presented as threatening and a source of social destabilization. At the helm of an opposition force, he may therefore have favoured immediate communication with his base with a mobilizing aim, waiting for more space in mainstream media.

Proceeding on the strictly linguistic aspects of the representational processes of the two leaders, we can first notice how the linguistic variety is greater, for both leaders, in posts centred on immigration than those produced in general, as evidenced by the greater quantity of hapax (i.e., words with frequency of one) present in the subsets. This linguistic dispersion is an unexpected result, as we would have predicted a greater linguistic convergence as a signal of a stereotyped language more suited to a theme dealt with according to the canons established by a right-wing narrative. Results relating to the most frequent words presented in the words clouds allow a first observation about Italian populism actually characterized by the three lines - anti-immigration – defence of national/local community – anti-politics - illustrated by Biorcio (2015). In particular, we found references to anti-immigration in Salvini, and to national and local communities both in Di Maio and in Salvini, while in Di Maio we found many references to the institutional political domain without knowing how much they are related to anti-politics. A second remark concerns the divisive purposes typical of populist discourse implied in the verbal form “they are,” marking both Di Maio and Salvini’s communication, in general and in immigration posts. This presence accompanied by a frequent use of “they/their” can be interpreted as a clear signal of that populist rhetoric of exclusion, dichotomous and conflictive, based on the ingroup/outgroup polarization. A third observation, concerning similar trend for both leaders, is the recall to the Five Star Movement for Di Maio and to the League for Salvini as a signal of an identitarian self-reference, in order to build/reinforce/maintain a collective identity with their followers. A fourth annotation pertains the centrality of references to Italy and Italians for both leaders, coherent with the sovereign ideology of the populist forces.

Moving on the major differences between the two leaders we can note, for Di Maio, the evident reference to a collective identity linked to the preference for the first plural pronominal forms over the singular forms, both in general corpus and in the subset, while in Salvini there is a centrality of the first singular pronominal and possessive inflections (I, me, my), even if it is accompanied by the plural forms. A second differentiation has to do with the reference to “citizens” in the case of Di Maio. It is a word frequently used in general by the Five Star Movement to evoke their will to be a force of radical change by referring to the birth of that new political subject, the citizens, born in the aftermath of the French revolution of 1879. Instead, for Salvini, we see the use of a more neutral-generic “friends,” which alludes to a language of feelings. A third differential aspect concerns the linguistic way of referring to immigration. The

target of immigration-centred posts is defined by Di Maio mainly in terms of “migrant,” a word considered “politically correct” because with the present participle it indicates a more active role than the word “immigrant,” which in Italian is a past participle (*immigrati*), that suggests a passive, invasive phenomenon. This last type of mention is present in Salvini immigration subset where there are a variety of words referred to the target – mainly “immigrants / refugees / immigration,” with “migrants” relegated to a marginal position. These linguistic differences confirm the basic assumption of the theory of social representations on the opacity and non-neutrality of language, finding a confirmation in the socio-psychological investigation which has shown the importance of labels in inducing specific inferences that are more or less prejudicial (Wyszynski, Guerra, & Bierwiazzonek, 2019). Thus, it is no coincidence that the references to the immigration words in Salvini are accompanied by stigma-words such as “illegal,” “invasion,” “crime,” “clandestinely,” evoking an emotional content and a reminder of the threat of the subset posts, while in Di Maio there is a prevailing neutral conflictive tone linked to the references to the ingroup “Italy,” “Italians,” versus the outgroup “Europe,” and “European”. Lastly, the mobilizing intent of Salvini’s communication is underlined by the frequent use of different hastags – e.g., #stop-invasion / # Ivoteno – almost entirely absent from Di Maio posts. In this way the social representations of immigration constructed by Salvini, on the one hand, show their polemical characterization, in competition with the representations of other social groups, referred to more or less explicitly in his posts. On the other hand, these representations highlight the will of the leader to influence not only the way of thinking about immigrants, but also the way of acting towards them by constituting the daily practices of his interlocutors, according to a dynamic widely analyzed by scholars of social representations. (see for example Howart, 2006). Thus, the critical vocation of this approach is highlighted. Social representations are not only forms of knowledge of reality, but also forms of practical action that intervene on the social to produce change or ensure stability, as was demonstrated in our case. The representations of immigration constructed by Salvini in proposing a particular interpretation of this phenomenon immediately stimulate specific ways of intervening on it to ensure stability to a social system shown to be in danger. In this dynamic, the same researcher who analyzes, interprets, makes these processes intelligible, is then a direct participant in the social confrontation, revealing the role and functions of certain social practices, and denouncing the fictitious game of their neutrality.

As for the emotional regime and angry populism, both are higher in Salvini than Di Maio, and especially more in immigration posts. In this way, the social representations of immigration constructed by Salvini are shaped by the creation of a negative affective sense. This result shows how immigrants are used as a scapegoat towards which to convey anger and frustration according to a rhetoric widely used by Salvini, which significantly embodies that angry populism, successfully ridden by Trump (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018). Salvini thus presents himself as a real entrepreneur of fear following a dynamic that deserves to be deepened for the socio-psychological processes that it triggers. In this regard, theories and models exist in the literature that have analyzed and explained the role, function, and consequences of the perceived threat and fear in the political sphere. In particular, Jost and colleagues (2003) have shown how conservatism and right-wing authoritarianism are positively associated with the perception of danger and a special sensitivity to the fear and perceived threat. In this way, the conservative ideology would be able to satisfy the need to face the uncertainty and the social threat. In our case, a study conducted on the posts of Di Maio and Salvini in the last three years (Di Cicco & Sensales, 2019), showed just how the followers of Salvini had greater emotional reactions and anger levels, compared to those of Di Maio. Based on these results we can hypothesize that Salvini is better able than Di Maio to activate a syntonic communication with the moods of his own base. Therefore, it is important to study the possible impact of authoritarianism evoked by Salvini in relation to his rhetoric on the need for social security, order, and legality.

As for the representations of populism, and their temporal focus on the present, preferred by both leaders but higher in Di Maio than in Salvini, we can observe that it is consistent with the populist thin ideology, entirely flattened on the “here and now,” a present to be contrasted without an overall prospective view of social change. The last consideration is dedicated to the informal language rate higher in Salvini than in Di Maio, showing in this way as, for Salvini, there is a preference for “low” form of language recalling the characterization of populism introduced by Ostinguy (2017) and contraposed to the more formal and “high” language of mainstream elitist politics.

We will stop here with our final reflections. The study has several limitations, among which we can mention the lack of a more in-depth and systematic analysis of the use of pronominal forms in the two leaders. As demonstrated by the seminal work of Mulhausler and Harré (1990), these forms play a fundamental role in the study of identity construction. Thus,

for example, a qualitative analysis of the value of the context of use of the various pronominal forms could highlight possible biases in favour of the ingroup (positive valence) and against the outgroup (negative valence). Or even the categorical amplitude of the "we" could show how much one wants to exercise a hegemonic function by expanding the level of inclusiveness as much as possible (from the "we" party, to the "we" opposition / government, to the "we" people, to the "we" Italians). The continuation of the investigation will focus more on these aspects and on the role of the diachronic dimension to analyze whether the processes highlighted here were influenced by the different role played by the two leaders after winning the 2018 political elections, when they passed from their role of opposition to that of government. Furthermore, we will extend the period under observation until the end of 2019 thus covering the phase in which the Five Star Movement broke with the Salvini League - which thus returns to be an opposition party - and inaugurates a new government with the left-wing Democratic Party. In this way we will be able to observe the evolution of the attention toward immigration topic in the two leaders with respect to changes of their role in the political arena. Finally, we will also take into consideration the text of the comments of the followers of the two leaders, thus filling a gap in the studies in this field. We will thus be able to compare the representations produced by the different actors who intervene on social media, in order to highlight the syntonic and dystonic aspects of their messages, thus providing an overall picture that involves both political professionals and lay people participating in the social arena.

Notes

1. In Italian the verbal form "sono" is identical for the "I" (*io sono*) and for the "they" (*essi sono*), thus, when the pronominal forms were omitted, we conducted a qualitative contextual analysis to disambiguate the verbal forms.

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Supplementary Materials

Appendix 1

Guide to Supplementary Materials

Words between asterisks (*) are made up by lemmatization grouping, whose correspondent Italian roots are in the left-sided column Words (IT).

Pronouns between square brackets [] are implied by the Italian inflection of the verbs.

In case of adjective, we indicated the several flections present in the Italian corpus.

Slash bar / denotes the several flections of the adjective, ordered by frequency.

Double slash bar // splits different Italian words that mean the same in English.

Appendix 2

Luigi Di Maio. General corpus (without immigration posts). Percentage frequency is scaled to the size of the corpus (N = 275770)

| Words (IT) | Words (EN) | Frequency | Percentage frequency |
|----------------------------|------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| [essi] sono // stanno | *they are* | 1473 | 0.53% |
| nostr -a /-o / -i / -e | *our* | 1384 | 0.50% |
| cittadin- | *citizen* | 1182 | 0.43% |
| Movimento 5 Stelle | 5 Stars Movement | 962 | 0.35% |
| [noi] abbiamo | we have | 805 | 0.29% |
| voi // vi | *you* | 763 | 0.28% |
| legge | *law* | 755 | 0.27% |
| Parlament- | *Parliament* | 724 | 0.26% |
| [noi] siamo // stiamo | *we are* | 715 | 0.26% |
| Euro | Euro | 708 | 0.26% |
| Italia | Italy | 671 | 0.24% |
| noi | we | 651 | 0.24% |
| governo | government | 646 | 0.23% |
| ho | I have | 618 | 0.22% |
| Italian -i /-o /-e | *Italian* | 585 | 0.21% |
| loro | they / their | 583 | 0.21% |
| Paese | Country | 553 | 0.20% |
| giorn- | *day* | 545 | 0.20% |
| me / mi | *me* | 538 | 0.20% |
| persone // popolo // gente | *people* | 537 | 0.19% |
| mi -a /-o | *my* | 531 | 0.19% |
| anni | years | 531 | 0.19% |
| Renzi | Renzi | 500 | 0.18% |
| PD | PD | 480 | 0.17% |
| Sindac- | *Mayor* | 455 | 0.16% |
| elezion- // elettor- | *election* | 451 | 0.16% |
| aziend- // impres- | *company* | 449 | 0.16% |
| nuov -a / -e / -i / -o | *new* | 444 | 0.16% |
| lavoro | job / work | 441 | 0.16% |
| partit- | *party* | 412 | 0.15% |
| milioni | millions | 388 | 0.14% |
| politica | politics | 378 | 0.14% |
| Presidente | President | 358 | 0.13% |
| dir- | *say* | 356 | 0.13% |
| Camera | Chamber | 355 | 0.13% |
| pubblic- | *public* | 354 | 0.13% |
| vot- | *vote* | 342 | 0.12% |
| candidat- | *candidate* | 336 | 0.12% |
| temp- // volt- | *time* | 333 | 0.12% |
| insieme | together | 330 | 0.12% |

| | | | |
|----------------|-------------------------|-----|-------|
| io | I | 326 | 0.12% |
| [io] sono | I am | 322 | 0.12% |
| region- | *region* | 314 | 0.11% |
| parte | part | 304 | 0.11% |
| comun- | *common / city* | 303 | 0.11% |
| piazza | square | 295 | 0.11% |
| soldi | money | 294 | 0.11% |
| Consigl- | *Council* | 288 | 0.10% |
| salar- | *salary* | 283 | 0.10% |
| banc- | *bank* | 263 | 0.10% |
| Roma | Rome | 261 | 0.09% |
| reddito | income | 260 | 0.09% |
| sera | evening | 248 | 0.09% |
| propost- | *proposal* | 247 | 0.09% |
| ben- | *good* | 230 | 0.08% |
| Senato | Senate | 226 | 0.08% |
| collegatevi | connect | 220 | 0.08% |
| Costituzion- | *Constitution* | 217 | 0.08% |
| [noi] vediamo | we see | 216 | 0.08% |
| forza | strenght | 205 | 0.07% |
| mesi | months | 201 | 0.07% |
| famigl- | *family* | 194 | 0.07% |
| vita | life | 185 | 0.07% |
| casa | home | 179 | 0.06% |
| evento | event | 177 | 0.06% |
| Napoli | Naples | 175 | 0.06% |
| tagl- | *cut* | 171 | 0.06% |
| deve | must | 170 | 0.06% |
| deputati | deputies | 166 | 0.06% |
| problem- | *problem* | 163 | 0.06% |
| campania | campania | 163 | 0.06% |
| [noi] vogliamo | we want | 163 | 0.06% |
| incontro | meeting | 162 | 0.06% |
| modo | way | 160 | 0.06% |
| miliardi | billion | 159 | 0.06% |
| intervista | interview | 159 | 0.06% |
| grande | great | 155 | 0.06% |
| Europa | Europe | 149 | 0.05% |
| Ministro | Minister | 149 | 0.05% |
| scuola | school | 149 | 0.05% |
| città | city | 148 | 0.05% |
| aula | hall | 148 | 0.05% |
| mondo | world | 148 | 0.05% |
| [noi] dobbiamo | we must | 147 | 0.05% |
| cambiare | change | 145 | 0.05% |
| saranno | they will be | 142 | 0.05% |
| fine | end | 141 | 0.05% |
| possibile | possible | 140 | 0.05% |
| referendum | referendum | 139 | 0.05% |
| riforma | reform | 138 | 0.05% |
| repubblica | republic | 138 | 0.05% |
| settimana | week | 138 | 0.05% |
| campagna | campaign // countryside | 136 | 0.05% |
| decreto | decree | 135 | 0.05% |
| terra | land | 134 | 0.05% |

| | | | |
|--------------|------------|-----|-------|
| [essi] fanno | they do | 133 | 0.05% |
| politiche | policies | 130 | 0.05% |
| Sicilia | Sicily | 127 | 0.05% |
| futuro | future | 126 | 0.05% |
| corruzione | corruption | 123 | 0.04% |

Appendix 3

Luigi Di Maio. Immigration corpus. Percentage frequency is scaled to the size of the corpus (N = 25631)

| Words (IT) | Words (EN) | Frequency | Percentage frequency |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| [essi] sono // stanno | *they are* | 147 | 0.57% |
| nostr -a / -e / -i / -o | *our* | 144 | 0.56% |
| Italia | Italy | 128 | 0.50% |
| Paese | Country | 104 | 0.41% |
| Europe -a / -e / -o / -i | *European* | 103 | 0.40% |
| Italian -a / -e / -i / -o | *Italian* | 100 | 0.39% |
| govern- | *government* | 89 | 0.35% |
| cittadin- | *citizen* | 81 | 0.32% |
| [noi] abbiamo | we have | 78 | 0.30% |
| Movimento 5 Stelle | 5 Stars Movement | 68 | 0.27% |
| noi | we | 68 | 0.27% |
| migranti | migrants | 67 | 0.26% |
| loro | they / their | 64 | 0.25% |
| [noi] siamo/stiamo | *we are* | 62 | 0.24% |
| Europa | Europe | 55 | 0.21% |
| Euro | Euro | 48 | 0.19% |
| Renzi | Renzi | 47 | 0.18% |
| immigrazione | immigration | 43 | 0.17% |
| anni | years | 42 | 0.16% |
| su -a / -o | *his / her / its* | 41 | 0.16% |
| [io] ho | I have | 41 | 0.16% |
| persone // popolo | *people* | 39 | 0.15% |
| ONG | NGO | 39 | 0.15% |
| voi // vi | *you* | 38 | 0.15% |
| temp- // volt- | *time* | 36 | 0.14% |
| lavoro | job / work | 36 | 0.14% |
| presidente | President | 35 | 0.14% |
| Unione | Union | 35 | 0.14% |
| milioni | millions | 34 | 0.13% |
| PD | PD | 34 | 0.13% |
| me / mi | *me* | 33 | 0.13% |
| politica | politics | 33 | 0.13% |
| parlar- | *speak* | 32 | 0.12% |
| giorn- | *day* | 31 | 0.12% |
| bisogn- | *need* | 31 | 0.12% |
| affari // business | *business* | 30 | 0.12% |
| UE | EU | 29 | 0.11% |
| nuov -i / -o | *new* | 28 | 0.11% |
| partit- | *party* | 28 | 0.11% |
| Parlamento | Parliament | 28 | 0.11% |
| parte | part | 26 | 0.10% |
| dar- // dat- | *give* | 25 | 0.10% |
| sono | I am | 25 | 0.10% |
| giovani | young people | 25 | 0.10% |
| mi -a / -o | *my* | 24 | 0.09% |

| | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|----|-------|
| [noi] dobbiamo | we must | 24 | 0.09% |
| io | I | 23 | 0.09% |
| miliardi | billion | 22 | 0.09% |
| elezion- // elettorale- | *election* | 21 | 0.08% |
| reddito | income | 21 | 0.08% |
| Libia | Libya | 21 | 0.08% |
| Roma | Rome | 21 | 0.08% |
| immigrati | immigrants | 20 | 0.08% |
| legge | law | 20 | 0.08% |
| mesi | months | 20 | 0.08% |
| economic -i / -o | *economic* | 19 | 0.07% |
| banche | banks | 19 | 0.07% |
| grande | great | 19 | 0.07% |
| soldi | money | 19 | 0.07% |
| argomento | topic | 19 | 0.07% |
| grand -e / -i | *big* | 18 | 0.07% |
| comun- | *common / city* | 18 | 0.07% |
| France | France | 18 | 0.07% |
| referendum | referendum | 18 | 0.07% |
| centr- | *center* | 17 | 0.07% |
| corruzione | corruption | 17 | 0.07% |
| problema | problem | 17 | 0.07% |
| lei | she | 17 | 0.07% |
| caso | case | 16 | 0.06% |
| imprese | companies | 16 | 0.06% |
| esempio | example | 16 | 0.06% |
| storia | history | 16 | 0.06% |
| politiche | policies | 16 | 0.06% |
| lavoratori | workers | 16 | 0.06% |
| consiglio | Council | 15 | 0.06% |
| emergenza | emergency | 15 | 0.06% |
| maggioranza | majority | 15 | 0.06% |
| ministro | Minister | 15 | 0.06% |
| risorse | resources | 15 | 0.06% |
| insieme | together | 15 | 0.06% |
| voto | vote | 15 | 0.06% |
| modo | way | 15 | 0.06% |
| chiesto | asked | 14 | 0.05% |
| Camera | Chamber | 14 | 0.05% |
| commissione | Commission | 14 | 0.05% |
| contratto | contract | 14 | 0.05% |
| Dublino | Dublin | 14 | 0.05% |
| faccia | face | 14 | 0.05% |
| istituzioni | institutions | 14 | 0.05% |
| regno | kingdom | 14 | 0.05% |
| gestione | management | 14 | 0.05% |
| regolamento | regulation | 14 | 0.05% |
| vengono | they come | 14 | 0.05% |
| unito | united | 14 | 0.05% |
| futuro | future | 13 | 0.05% |
| aula | hall | 13 | 0.05% |
| accoglienza | hospitality | 13 | 0.05% |
| [voi] avete | you have | 13 | 0.05% |
| forza | strenght | 13 | 0.05% |
| sicurezza | safety | 13 | 0.05% |

Appendix 4

Matteo Salvini. General corpus (without immigration posts). Percentage frequency is scaled to the size of the corpus (N = 69242)

| Words (IT) | Words (EN) | Frequency | Percentage frequency |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| voi / vi | *you* | 600 | 0.87% |
| nostr -a / -i / -o / -e | *our* | 324 | 0.47% |
| Italian -i / -o / -a / -e | *Italian* | 315 | 0.45% |
| Lega | League | 296 | 0.43% |
| me // mi | *me* | 291 | 0.42% |
| Renzi | Renzi | 253 | 0.37% |
| [essi] sono // stanno | *they are* | 242 | 0.35% |
| Italia | Italy | 231 | 0.33% |
| gente // persone // popolo | *people* | 214 | 0.27% |
| amic- | *friend* | 199 | 0.29% |
| io | I | 180 | 0.26% |
| mi -a /-o / -iei / -e | *my* | 168 | 0.24% |
| governo | government | 164 | 0.24% |
| casa | home | 159 | 0.23% |
| noi | we | 151 | 0.22% |
| ben- | *good* | 150 | 0.22% |
| anni | years | 139 | 0.20% |
| [io] ho | I have | 139 | 0.20% |
| lavoro | work / job | 133 | 0.19% |
| Milano | Milan | 130 | 0.19% |
| Euro | Euro | 127 | 0.18% |
| piazza | square | 126 | 0.18% |
| PD | PD | 125 | 0.18% |
| insieme | together | 124 | 0.18% |
| domenica | Sunday | 123 | 0.18% |
| Europa | Europe | 118 | 0.17% |
| [io] sono | I am | 118 | 0.17% |
| [noi] siamo // stiamo | *we are* | 115 | 0.17% |
| vostr -o / -i // tuo | *your* | 113 | 0.16% |
| #4marzovotolega | #march4Ivoteleague | 105 | 0.15% |
| [voi] siete | you are | 100 | 0.14% |
| Roma | Rome | 96 | 0.14% |
| bell- | *beautiful* | 95 | 0.14% |
| loro | they / their | 94 | 0.14% |
| su -a /-o | *his / her / its* | 94 | 0.14% |
| temp- // volt- | *time* | 94 | 0.14% |
| via | away | 94 | 0.14% |
| Paese | Country | 93 | 0.13% |
| #primagliitaliani | #Italiansfirst | 90 | 0.13% |
| futuro | future | 89 | 0.13% |
| legge | law | 89 | 0.13% |
| sera | evening | 89 | 0.13% |
| essere | to be | 87 | 0.13% |
| Fornero | Fornero | 82 | 0.12% |
| giorn- | *day* | 77 | 0.11% |
| milioni | millions | 76 | 0.11% |
| abbiamo | we have | 75 | 0.11% |
| dir- | *say* | 75 | 0.11% |
| Rom | Roma people | 75 | 0.11% |
| avete | you have | 73 | 0.11% |

| | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|----|-------|
| sinistra | left-wing | 73 | 0.11% |
| #iovotono | #ivoteno | 71 | 0.10% |
| #andiamoagovernare | #letsgotogovern | 70 | 0.10% |
| cittadini | citizens | 69 | 0.10% |
| girare | to turn | 69 | 0.10% |
| aspetto | appearance | 67 | 0.10% |
| intervista | interview | 67 | 0.10% |
| mattina | morning | 64 | 0.09% |
| scuol- | *school* | 59 | 0.09% |
| vita | life | 59 | 0.09% |
| liberiamoci | let's get rid | 58 | 0.08% |
| libertà | freedom | 58 | 0.08% |
| bambin- // figl- | *children* | 56 | 0.08% |
| centr- | *center* | 56 | 0.08% |
| figli | sons | 56 | 0.08% |
| Bologna | Bologna | 55 | 0.08% |
| minuti | minutes | 55 | 0.08% |
| nuov -o / -a | *new* | 55 | 0.08% |
| pazzesco // matti | *crazy* | 55 | 0.08% |
| bisogn- | *need* | 54 | 0.08% |
| referendum | referendum | 52 | 0.08% |
| sicurezza | safety | 52 | 0.08% |
| sabato | Saturday | 51 | 0.07% |
| tribunale | court | 51 | 0.07% |
| pront -o / -i | *ready* | 50 | 0.07% |
| tasse | tax | 50 | 0.07% |
| faccia | face / do | 49 | 0.07% |
| voglia | wish | 49 | 0.07% |
| intervento | intervention | 48 | 0.07% |
| mondo | world | 48 | 0.07% |
| città | city | 47 | 0.07% |
| parte | part | 47 | 0.07% |
| piace | likes | 47 | 0.07% |
| ragazzi | boys | 47 | 0.07% |
| soldi | money | 47 | 0.07% |
| #domenicavotolega | #onsundayivoteleague | 46 | 0.07% |
| grande | big / great | 45 | 0.06% |
| difesa | defense | 44 | 0.06% |
| fiscale | fiscal | 44 | 0.06% |
| mano | hand | 44 | 0.06% |
| RAI | RAI | 44 | 0.06% |
| famigl- | *family* | 43 | 0.06% |
| state | been | 43 | 0.06% |
| unica | only | 43 | 0.06% |
| Bruxelles | Brussels | 42 | 0.06% |
| parole | words | 42 | 0.06% |
| ripropongo | I propose again | 42 | 0.06% |
| buonsenso | common sense | 41 | 0.06% |
| polizia | police | 41 | 0.06% |
| cambiare | to change | 40 | 0.06% |

Appendix 5

Matteo Salvini. Immigration posts. Percentage frequency is scaled to the size of the corpus (N = 23991)

| Words (IT) | Words (EN) | Frequency | Percentage frequency |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------------|
| clandestin- | *illegal* | 181 | 0.75% |
| Italian -i / -o | *Italian* | 176 | 0.73% |
| immigrati | immigrants | 143 | 0.60% |
| Italia | Italy | 139 | 0.58% |
| [essi] sono | they are | 124 | 0.52% |
| voi // vi | *you* | 101 | 0.42% |
| nostr -e / -a/ -i / -o | *our* | 100 | 0.42% |
| Renzi | Renzi | 99 | 0.41% |
| profughi | refugees | 92 | 0.38% |
| immigrazione | immigration | 90 | 0.38% |
| governo | government | 78 | 0.33% |
| Lega | League | 76 | 0.32% |
| casa | home | 69 | 0.29% |
| loro | they / their | 69 | 0.29% |
| io | I | 67 | 0.28% |
| #stopinvasione | #stopinvasion | 60 | 0.25% |
| lavoro | work / job | 57 | 0.24% |
| invasione | invasion | 53 | 0.22% |
| Euro | Euro | 51 | 0.21% |
| me // mi | *me* | 50 | 0.21% |
| PD | PD | 49 | 0.20% |
| anni | years | 47 | 0.20% |
| noi | we | 46 | 0.19% |
| dir- | *say* | 45 | 0.19% |
| migliaia // -mila | *thousand* | 44 | 0.18% |
| condivid- | *share* | 42 | 0.18% |
| persone // popolo // gente | *people* | 41 | 0.17% |
| Europa | Europe | 40 | 0.17% |
| milioni | millions | 40 | 0.17% |
| hotel // albergo- | *hotel* | 39 | 0.16% |
| centr- | *center* | 37 | 0.15% |
| guerra | war | 37 | 0.15% |
| Paese | Country | 36 | 0.15% |
| giorn- | *day* | 34 | 0.14% |
| presunti | alleged | 33 | 0.14% |
| pazzesco // matti | *crazy* | 32 | 0.13% |
| Milano | Milan | 30 | 0.13% |
| sicurezza | safety | 29 | 0.12% |
| [essi] fanno | they do | 28 | 0.12% |
| [io] ho | I have | 28 | 0.12% |
| espulsion- | *expulsion* | 28 | 0.12% |
| #iovotono | #ivoteno | 27 | 0.11% |
| #primagliitaliani | #italiansfirst | 27 | 0.11% |
| [io] sono | I am | 27 | 0.11% |
| tasse | tax | 27 | 0.11% |
| vogliono | they want | 27 | 0.11% |
| amici | friends | 26 | 0.11% |
| legge | law | 26 | 0.11% |
| siamo | we are | 26 | 0.11% |
| soldi | money | 26 | 0.11% |
| spese | expense | 26 | 0.11% |
| stop | stop | 26 | 0.11% |

| | | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|----|-------|
| Alfano | Alfano | 24 | 0.10% |
| bisogn- | *need* | 24 | 0.10% |
| mano | hand | 24 | 0.10% |
| vergogna | shame | 24 | 0.10% |
| #4marzovotolega | #march4ivoteleague | 23 | 0.10% |
| centinaia | hundreds | 22 | 0.09% |
| città | city | 22 | 0.09% |
| ordine | order | 22 | 0.09% |
| piazza | square | 22 | 0.09% |
| sinistra | left-wing | 22 | 0.09% |
| subito | immediately | 22 | 0.09% |
| buonisti | gooders | 21 | 0.09% |
| delinquenti | offenders / criminals | 21 | 0.09% |
| figli | children | 21 | 0.09% |
| Roma | Rome | 21 | 0.09% |
| schifo | disgust | 21 | 0.09% |
| secondo | second // according to | 21 | 0.09% |
| Africa | Africa | 20 | 0.08% |
| cittadini | citizens | 20 | 0.08% |
| migranti | migrants | 20 | 0.08% |
| normale | normal | 20 | 0.08% |
| può | can | 20 | 0.08% |
| stranieri | foreigners | 20 | 0.08% |
| Boldrini | Boldrini | 19 | 0.08% |
| unica | only | 19 | 0.08% |
| ascoltate | listen | 18 | 0.08% |
| asilo | asylum | 18 | 0.08% |
| cibo | food | 18 | 0.08% |
| confini | borders | 18 | 0.08% |
| domenica | Sunday | 18 | 0.08% |
| faccia | face // do | 18 | 0.08% |
| Fornero | Fornero | 18 | 0.08% |
| mondo | world | 18 | 0.08% |
| reato | crime | 18 | 0.08% |
| sabato | Saturday | 18 | 0.08% |
| soluzione | solution | 18 | 0.08% |
| accoglienza | hospitality | 17 | 0.07% |
| bene | good | 17 | 0.07% |
| firmare | to sign | 17 | 0.07% |
| parte | part | 17 | 0.07% |
| rispetto | respect | 17 | 0.07% |
| scafisti | people smugglers | 17 | 0.07% |
| #votosubito | #votenow | 16 | 0.07% |
| mare | sea | 16 | 0.07% |
| minuti | minutes | 16 | 0.07% |
| problemi | problems | 16 | 0.07% |
| finti | false | 15 | 0.06% |
| vita | life | 15 | 0.06% |
