

The ‘Synonymy’ of *Gay* and *Omosessuale* in Italian: A Corpus Linguistic Analysis of Two News Websites

Matteo Socciarelli*

Hawaii Pacific University

Abstract

This study explores the apparent synonymy between *omosessuale* (homosexual) and *gay* (gay) in Italian and what attitudes prompt their usage. Two corpora were generated and analyzed, one from a Catholic news website, *Tempi*, and one from an LGBTQIA+ affiliated website, *Gay.it*. *Tempi* generally showed a negative attitude towards homosexuality and the institutionalization of Civil Unions in Italy, resulting in a polarized use of the two terms, with *gay* being used to represent ‘foreign’ and subversive practices that undermine the Church’s heteronormative view of the ‘natural family.’ In contrast, a positive endorsement of LGBTQIA+ lives expressed in *Gay.it* generated a more nuanced use of *omosessuale* and *gay*, with the former being used in more formal discourses. The findings suggest how teachers of English to speakers of other languages should be aware of the political and cultural practices behind using (apparently) synonymous words. The paper further discusses implications of borrowing foreign terms, a process that is seldom neutral or straightforward.

Introduction

In Italian, both the borrowed term *gay* and the native term *omosessuale* (homosexual) are used as nouns or adjectives to define a gay individual, man or woman (even though *gay* is used more generally for men). Through the analysis of two corpora created from the digital archives of two news websites, the present paper aims at establishing whether the terms *gay* and *omosessuale* are synonyms in Italian, in which discourses they tend to occur, and whether differences in usage are attributable to different attitudes towards sexual or gender identities. The study finds its framework in Queer Linguistics, a branch of Queer Theory still largely overlooked in the Italian academic landscape. Its goal is to promote a more critical evaluation of the hard-to-change normativities ingrained in Italian society through a linguistic analysis and to shed light on the social aspects of language borrowing. After a brief presentation of the literature, a description of the creation of the two corpora is given, followed by a corpus analysis of two news sources with different ideological leanings. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of implications for language teaching and learning.



Socciarelli, M. (2019). The ‘synonymy’ of *gay* and *omosessuale* in Italian: A corpus linguistic analysis of two news websites. *TESOL Working Paper Series*, 17, 46-68.

Website: Hawaii Pacific University <http://www.hpu.edu>

* Email: msocciarelli1@my.hpu.edu. Address: Department of English and Applied Linguistics, Waterfront Plaza 6 – 313, 500 Ala Moana Honolulu, HI 96813, USA

Background

Italian thesauri broadly define *gay* and *omosessuale* as synonyms, but a more in-depth analysis of dictionary definitions for the two terms shows a less uniformed picture. Some dictionaries, such as Zingarelli, simply associate the two words as synonyms without providing any context for their separate usages. Others, such as Treccani, a highly respected encyclopedia with an online dictionary service, suggest that the two words are not perfect synonyms, i.e. they cannot be used interchangeably in each and every case (Gay, 2017; Omosessuale, 2017). Whereas Treccani defines *omosessuale* as “related to, or characterized by homosexuality” for the adjective and “one who turns their sexual attention to their own sex” for the noun (Omosessuale, 2017), it gives a different definition for *gay* (Gay, 2017): “homosexual (the term does not have a negative connotation, and it is thus preferred in certain contexts).” The somewhat vague definition seems to suggest that *omosessuale* has a negative connotation in some contexts, but it does not explain where and when *gay* is preferable. A common feature of all dictionaries seems to be that *omosessuale* is usually defined in relation to the word *homosexuality*, or expressions such as “related to same-sex,” whereas *gay* is commonly defined by providing the synonym *omosessuale*. The semantic relationship between the two words seems thus to suggest that: a) there is a certain degree of synonymy; b) *omosessuale* is used to illustrate the meaning of *gay* but not vice-versa; c) despite this, some dictionaries suggest a more positive meaning for *gay*, with little elaboration of the connotation. It is clear that, in order to find out whether these two terms are really synonyms and whether they actually carry different connotations, more empirical research has to be conducted.

Corpus Linguistics

A fertile ground for making inferences in regards to the questions raised above is that of Corpus Linguistics (CL). CL refers to the study of language through *language corpora*. Stubbs (in Davies & Elder, 2004) defines a corpus as a text collection comprising three main features: size, channel and purpose (2004, p. 106). The collection should count millions of tokens of words; it has to be readable by particular computer software, called concordancers; it must serve specific purposes of language analysis, to provide either “a sample of specific text-types or a broad [...] sample of a language” (p. 106).

Corpus linguistics has been largely employed for the study of synonymy. A concordancer software, in fact, offers tools that allow researchers to investigate how words are used in real life contexts, providing statistical data on words association patterns (concordances and collocations among others) that, once interpreted, can explain the relationships that exist between words, and lexical choices (Edmond & Hirst, 2001). For synonymy specifically, scholars have investigated the English language in regards to verbs such as *obtain* and *gain* (Gu, 2017) and *preserve* and *conserve* (Li, 2019), adjectives such as *rather*, *quite*, *fairly*, and *pretty* (Desagulier, 2014), and the study of (near-)synonymy is growing among other languages such as Chinese (Xiao & Mecenery, 2006).

CL has been employed widely among scholars to investigate various discourses and the depiction of reality through language in different media (Baker et al., 2008). It can thus be implemented in research with a critical view: Soto-Almela & Alcaraz-Mármol (2017) have used it

in combination with the concept of semantic prosody to investigate the collocations of the word *inmigración* (immigration) and its semantic prosody in two Spain's newspapers, aiming at uncovering attitudes behind the portrayal of immigration in the public discourse. Their corpus linguistic analysis revealed that, contrary to the initial expectations, both the conservative and the more progressive newspaper share a rather negative view of immigration. This paper aims to carry out a similar research to gain insight on the degree of synonymy for *gay* and *omosessuale* in Italian.

Queer Linguistics

The general framework within which this corpus-based analysis will be carried out is that of Queer Linguistics, which has emanated from Queer Theory (QT). QT developed as a criticism of the *Gay and lesbians studies* of the 1970s and 1980s, when scholars and activists began expressing doubts about taking sexuality as a main identity category detached from other, plural identity-defining factors (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013; Sullivan, 2003). This shift worked to define the core project of QT—the “reconceptualisation of dominant discourses which shape our understanding of gender and sexuality, often to the detriment of people who [...] are judged as not meeting the heteronormative ideal” (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013).¹ This reconceptualization invests the term *queer* with the power of challenging established norms in two main directions. First, the idea of gender as a pluralism of gender identities opposes the traditional binarism male/female. Second, this counter-discourse problematizes heteronormativity as the paradigm around which other social realities have to gravitate (Watson, 2005).

QT focuses largely on questions of identity and gender. In postmodernist and constructivist views, gender and identity are believed to be performative, i.e. constantly constructed rather than being pre-existing, fixed categories, and the construction of gender occurs in and through discourse (Cameron, 2005). In light of these views, “researchers’ attention began to focus on the range of ways in which gender could be performed using the resources of linguistic variation” (2005, p. 491). This practice of queering the language constitutes the foundation for Queer Linguistics (QL), whose main interest is to investigate the way language can be employed to a) perpetrate (hetero)normative discourse and to represent gender as binary; b) queering those normativities and the taken-for-granted practices associated with them (Watson, 2005). It is important to stress how QL does not narrow its focus solely to LGBTQIA+ members, but its interest spans over all sexual identities and desires, heterosexuality included.

Among the various disciplines that can serve the purpose of QL, corpus linguistics, with its descriptive approach to language analysis, becomes a powerful tool to investigate how normativities and sexualities are constructed in written discourse across different media (Milani, 2013; Baker, 2005; Love & Baker, 2015). However, Italy is witnessing a remarkable scarcity of QL-related studies (aside from De Lucia, 2015, and the noteworthy first queer-related Italian journal, *Whatever*), with a total absence of corpus-based research on the matter. Along with the main purpose of the study, i.e., investigating the apparent synonymy of *gay* and *omosessuale*, a further aim of this research is thus to examine the Italian language through quantitative analysis

to uncover the types of discourse practices at play in the country in the construction of sexual identities.

Research Questions

The analysis of the data will address the following research questions:

- 1) How are the terms *gay* and *omosessuale* used in Italian?
- 2) How does the usage of each term construct and reflect the authors' viewpoints and agendas?

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, two corpora were created from two different news websites, *Tempi* and *Gay.it*. *Tempi* is a Catholic-inspired journal founded in 1994. After a brief closure in 2017, it is now published online on a monthly basis (<https://www.tempi.it/>). It is national in scope and covers a wide variety of topics, ranging from news, current affairs, culture, politics etc., mainly under a center-right, Catholic framework. It has always been vocal in regards to topics such as abortion and traditional family, aligning with the Church in deprecating the former and advocating for the latter. *Gay.it* is a prominent LGBTQIA+ media brand whose network comprises a website registered in 1997 (<https://www.gay.it/>), a vast community of users and a communication agency specialized in LGBTQIA+ merchandise. The website is one of the major providers for LGBTQIA+-related news in Italy, ranging from politics, news, and culture, to society and lifestyle, with the aim of promoting queer culture in Italy and its recognition in terms of social justice, cultural significance, and equity.

The time frame selected for the news collection was set between January 28 to May 28, 2016. During those months, Italy was going through a heated debate centered around the institution of Civil Unions for same-sex couples promoted by the Senator Monica Cirinnà's 76/2016 Bill, which took effect at the beginning of June 2016 after the approval by the Parliament on May, 20. In total, 99,690 words were collected from 154 news articles (69 articles from *Tempi*, 85 articles from *Gay.it*). At the end of the process, the *Tempi* corpus comprised 54,433 words, and the *Gay.it* corpus had a total of 45,257 words.

The two corpora were then uploaded on a free concordance software, AntConc (Anthony, 2019). The analysis focused on each term in each of the two corpora, in both their nominal and adjectival usages, to then extend the investigation to a cross-corpora analysis.

Findings

***Omosessual+* and *gay* in the *Tempi* corpus**

In the *Tempi* corpus, the word *omosessuale/i* (*omosessuale* is singular, *omosessuali* is plural; henceforth *omosessual+*) appeared 87 times, 72 times as an adjective (82.76%), and 15 times as a noun (17.24%). The word *gay* (unchanged for both singular and plural forms) occurred a total of 89 times, 81 times as an adjective (91%) and 8 times as a noun (9%). Despite the clear majority of the adjectival use for both words, it can be noted how *omosessual+* is used more frequently as a noun than *gay*.

Adjectival omosessual+ and gay

Figure 1 shows the frequency of collocates of both adjectival *omosessual+* and *gay* in the Tempi corpus, with an English translation. Although the two adjectives are used quite interchangeably for some terms with similar frequency (such as “couple[s]” and “Civil Unions”), there are elements of differentiation. In particular, “wedding(s)” and “adoption(s),” despite being in concordance with both terms in the corpus, collocate more frequently with adjectival *gay* (17 instances vs. 4 for “weddings”; 14 instances vs. 1 for “adoption[s]”). As far as unique collocates are concerned, the two terms witness a great degree of differentiation. The patterns of the collocates seem to suggest that *omosessual+*, as an adjective, is more used to define people and/or the familial institutions they build, such as “people,” “family,” “friends,” “spouse,” “women,” “children,” “parenthood,” “partner,” “student,” and “men.” It is thus noteworthy to see that adjectival *gay* collocates largely with *nozze*, *matrimonio* (both Italian translations of wedding), and *adozioni* (adoptions), which are familial words and, more importantly, terms that were at the core of the political debate at the time of the news.

A semantic prosody analysis of these three terms for adjectival *gay* revealed a majority of negative collocations for “adoptions” and *matrimonio*, and a majority of neutral collocations for *nozze*. Specifically, *matrimonio* was in some cases preceded by the prefix *simil*, used with the meaning of similar-but-less, as in *simil-matrimonio gay*; furthermore, in two instances, *matrimonio* was enclosed in quotation marks, as in ‘*matrimonio gay*,’ with the same meaning of similar-but-less expressed through mocking. Another example is *à la*, a French locution that means “in the style of, in the manner of,” found in the corpus in phrases such as *matrimonio gay à la Cirinnà* (*gay* wedding in the style of Cirinnà), which questions the validity of the Senator’s claims to institute the Civil Unions. Furthermore, terms such as “partner” or “Civil Unions” are sometimes accompanied by quotation marks to question the legitimacy of claims to equality made by the LGBTQIA+ community. This pattern seems to suggest that, in the Tempi corpus, adjectival *gay*, a foreign-sounding word borrowed from English, is used to invalidate the institutionalization of a ‘foreign’ familial reality, such as same-sex wedding, or the allowance for gay couples to adopt children. This delegitimization falls in line with a preferred representation of a heterosexual family, grounded on the view of gender as binary and the traditional goal of creating offspring, which constitutes one of the central normativities at the center of Catholic precepts.

The collocate frequency analysis seems to be corroborated by some of the news in the corpus portraying the adoption of children by gay couples as a trendy practice or a marketing operation carried out abroad, especially in the United States (Giovanardi, 2016; Boffi, 2016). Outside of the corpus, the Catholic rhetoric seems to run along similar lines. In fact, according to some Catholic scholars, such as O’Leary (2006), the increasing visibility of LGBTQIA+ issues and, more specifically, the emergent extension of familial rights to LGBTQIA+ people, is the byproduct of a ‘gender theory,’ an allegedly subversive endeavor perpetuated by the “*gay lobby*” (term also registered in the Tempi corpus) and feminist scholars, aimed at disrupting, among other things, the order of the traditional family (Garbagnoli, 2016).

Tempi Corpus					
Adjectival <i>Omosessual+</i> (Total: 72)			Adjectival <i>Gay</i> (Total: 81)		
Collocates	Translation	Frequency	Collocates	Translation	Frequency
Coppia/e@	Couple(s)	26	Coppia/e@	Couple(s)	18
Persona/e*	Person/people	11	Matrimoni(o)#	Wedding(s)	17
Unioni (Civili) @	(Civil) Unions	9	Adozione/i#	Adoption(s)	14
Matrimoni(o)#	Wedding(s)	4	Unioni (Civili)@	(Civil) Unions	9
Tendenza/e*	Tendency(es)	4	Nozze*	Matrimony	7
Famiglia/e*	Family(es)	3	Diritti*	Rights	4
Adozione/i#	Adoption(s)	1	Mondo*	World	2
Ambienti*	Environments	1	Agenda*	Agenda	1
Amici*	Friends	1	Alleanza*	Alliance	1
Comunità@	Community	1	Comunità@	Community	1
Condizione*	Condition	1	Conviventi@	Cohabitees	1
Coniuge*	Spouse	1	Icone*	Icons	1
Conviventi@	Cohabitees	1	Lobby*	Lobby	1
Desiderio*	Desire	1	Orgia*	Orgy	1
Donne*	Women	1	Questione*	Matter	1
Figli*	Children	1	Anti-*	Anti-	1
Genitorialità*	Parenthood	1	Occidentali*	Westerner	1
Organizzazioni*	Organizations	1			
Partner*	Partner	1			
Studente*	Student	1			
Uomini*	Men	1			

Note. Similar collocates between the two terms are marked by @; collocates that appear with different frequency are marked by #; unique collocates are marked by *

Figure 1. Collocate frequency of adjectival *omosessual+* and *gay* in the Tempi corpus

Furthermore, the data seem to point to a larger agenda embedded in the use of *gay* by the Tempi corpus. The way it has been introduced in the Italian language, the word *gay* carries the counter-discourse to heteronormativity fashioned by the gay liberation movement in the United States in the 80s, which reclaimed *gay* as a positive term. With this socio-political perspective, the Tempi writers' choice to a) use *gay* in collocation with *à la* or embed *matrimonio* in quotation

marks and b) present practices such as the Civil Unions and stepchild adoption as foreign and trendy might suggest a deliberate attempt at stripping the term *gay* off of its counter-hegemonic meaning, thus ignoring the Italian LGBTQIA+ community’s alignment with the liberation movement in the United States.

To gain more granularity in the analysis, the 22 noun collocates of *omosessual+* and the 17 ones of *gay* were then grouped according to semantic categories. Figure 2 shows the result of this grouping, with common semantic categories for the two terms in the left section and unique semantic categories presented in the right side of Figure 2.

Tempi Corpus: Common semantic categories		Tempi Corpus: Unique semantic categories	
Familial		Adjectival <i>Omossessual+</i>	Adjectival <i>Gay</i>
<i>Omossessual+</i> 48 (66.7%)	<i>Gay</i> 66 (81.4%)	People 13 (18.1%)	Politics 5 (6.2%)
<i>Couple(s)</i> <i>Children</i> <i>(Civil) Unions</i> <i>Spouse</i> <i>Wedding(s)</i> <i>Cohabitee</i> <i>Family(s)</i> <i>Parenthood</i> <i>Adoption</i> <i>Partner</i>	<i>Couple(s)</i> <i>Weddings</i> <i>Adoptions</i> <i>(Civil) Unions</i> <i>Matrimony</i> <i>Cohabitee</i>	<i>Person/People</i> <i>Men</i> <i>Women</i>	<i>Agenda</i> <i>Rights</i> Problem 2 (2.5%)
Aggregation		Orientation 5 (7%)	<i>Matter</i> <i>Anti-</i>
<i>Omossessual+</i> 4 (5.6%)	<i>Gay</i> 5 (6.2%)	<i>Tendency(s)</i> <i>Condition</i>	Society 1 (1.2%)
<i>Environments</i> <i>Friends</i> <i>Community</i> <i>Organization</i>	<i>World</i> <i>Alliance</i> <i>Community</i> <i>Lobby</i>	Occupation 1 (1.3%)	<i>Icon</i>
Sex		<i>Student</i>	Place of origin 1 (1.2%)
<i>Omossessual+</i> 1 (1.3%)	<i>Gay</i> 1 (1.2%)		<i>Westerner</i>
<i>Desire</i>	<i>Orgy</i>		

Figure 2. Semantic categories of the collocates of adjectival *omosessual+* and *gay* collocates in the Tempì Corpus

Figure 2 seems to corroborate the data in Figure 1. Looking at the most common category for both terms (familial), collocates of adjectival *omosessual+* comprise more terms that represent people as family components (“children,” “spouse,” “partner”), and not just the familial institution itself. At the same time, the higher frequency for adjectival *gay* compared to *omosessual+* (81.4% vs. 66.7%), which generally has a negative semantic prosody in this corpus (as shown in the examples above), seems to suggest the active and repeated attempt in the Tempì corpus to present the normalization of LGBTQIA+ forms of family as something negative and foreign.

Further, Figure 2 might suggest a pattern in which adjectival *omosessual+* is used to define words that gravitate more around the individual person and their sexuality (the “people,” “orientation,” and “occupation” categories), whereas *gay* is used as an adjective to define more ‘socio-political’ nouns (such as the “politics,” “problem” and “society” categories), usually with negative semantic prosody. In the “politics” category for example, “rights” registers three cases of negative semantic prosody, where the phrase *diritti gay* (gay rights) is enclosed in quotes and is in proximity to terms such as *drift*, or sentences that equate extending familial *gay rights* to trading the “last, unsellable heritage, that of the human life” (Amicone, 2016. Translation). The same pattern of using adjectival *omosessual+* to suggest a more internalized, personal view on homosexuality can be seen by comparing the two collocates in the “sex” category. Adjectival *omosessual+* collocated with “desire” in an article in which a gay Catholic man was defending his choice of partaking in the Family Day, a national demonstration in defence of the traditional family (Ponte, 2016). On the contrary, adjectival *gay* was in collocation with “orgy” in an article about a murder and allegations of its origins in religious backgrounds (Farina, 2016). This linguistic choice might suggest a homonormative² attempt by the Catholic journalists of representing ‘positive’ examples of homosexuality (i.e. gay individuals who, although being gay, respect the Catholic precepts), expressed by *omosessual+*, vs. more negative and murky lifestyles, expressed by *gay*. Once again, the borrowed term carries subversive implications. The reduction of the gay community to a more private dimension, and the usage of *gay* in negative semantic prosody in collocation with terms constructing a more socio-political discourse might also suggest a deliberate agenda to delegitimize the LGBTQIA+ community’s institutional and political claims for social justice. In other words, by making a socio-political problem into a personal one, the Tempì corpus neutralized the criticism that the Church oppresses the LGBTQIA+ community.

Nominal *omosessual+* and *gay*

Figure 3 shows the frequency of collocates of nominal *omosessual+* and *gay* in the Tempì corpus (with English translation). The collocates were within three words to the right and to the left of the two nouns. The words were further grouped in semantic categories (Figure 4).

Figure 3 shows a tendency in the Tempì corpus to use *omosessual+* more often than *gay* as a noun. The figure shows a great diversity of usages, with no shared terms and a maximum collocate frequency of 2 for both *omosessual+* and *gay*. Patterns could nonetheless be detected. Different from the adjectival usages of the two terms, both *omosessual+* and *gay*, as nouns, were in concordance with words identifying identity categories for people, such as “child,” “bisexual,” and “parents” for *omosessual+*, and “muslims,” “Italians,” “lesbians,” and “transgender” for *gay*. The nominal collocates seem to once again point to the delegitimization of the term *gay* as part of a counter discourse against the hegemonic, heteronormative one, by associating it to the foreign context where it originated, and, more in general, to an Other which does not fit in the conservative rhetoric expressed in Tempì. This is because, in the Italian heteronormative discourse, muslims, lesbians, and transgender people point to realities gravitating at the boundaries of the ‘hard-core’ Italian tradition, be it religious (muslims) or related to sex and

gender (lesbians and transgender people, as per Figure 4). Furthermore, “lesbians” and “trans” are used in negative semantic prosody, as they are in close proximity with the verbs “hate” and “to deny.” “Italian,” too, is used as an adjective in the nominal phrase “Italian gays” in a foreign context, such as in the sentence “California is the most popular destination among those *Italian gays* to whom [the adoption through surrogate] is denied by Eastern Europe or other low cost countries” (Boffi, 2016. Translation). The sentence is found in an article condemning the practice of *utero in affitto* (lit. translation “womb for rent,” adoption through surrogate) as a foreign practice that reduces human lives to a marketing transaction that people (a gay Italian politician, in the case of the article) have to carry out outside of Italy. The collocate “bisexual” expresses a sexual identity category outside of the Catholic normative space as well, and yet is in collocation with nominal *omosessual+*. The article in the Tempi corpus is an interview to a right-wing politician who is citing a report on an ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) survey, in which (quoting from the news) “6.7% of the [Italian] population [...] has declared to be homosexual/bisexual” (Guarneri, 2016. Translation). The survey report is available online (only in Italian) on the ISTAT website, and it was found that the term of choice to talk about gay individuals throughout the report is *omosessual+*.

Tempi Corpus					
Nominal <i>Omossessual+</i> (15)			Nominal <i>Gay</i> (8)		
Collocate	Translation	Frequency	Collocate	Translation	Frequency
Adottare/ Adozioni	To adopt/ Adoptions	2	Musulman+	Muslim(s)	2
Colpa	Fault	2	Curarsi	Seek treatment	1
Bambino	Child	1	Misericordioso	Merciful	1
Bisessuale	Bisexual	1	Era	Was	1
Comunità	Community	1	Italiani	Italians	1
Genitori	Parents	1	Lesbiche	Lesbians	1
Io	I	1	Trans	Transgender	1
Idea	Opinion	1			
Minoranza	Minority	1			
Mondo	World	1			
Nozze	Wedding	1			
Ombra	Shadow	1			
Seminari	Seminary	1			

Figure 3. Collocates frequency of nominal *omosessual+* and *gay* in the Tempi corpus

In the corpus, nominal *gay* is thus used as an identifier for people only in the dichotomy foreign/local, or different/same. The other collocates for nominal *gay*, in fact, are quotes from other sources—“merciful” is found in a reported sentence in a news article and the copula *era* (“was”) is part of a song title as reported in another article, “*Luca era gay e adesso sta con lei*” (“Luca was gay and now he is with her”).

Tempi corpus	
Nominal <i>Omosessuale</i>	Nominal <i>Gay</i>
Familial ; 5 (33.3%)	Religion ; 3 (37.5%)
<i>To adopt Child Parents Adoptions Wedding</i>	<i>Muslim(s)</i> <i>Merciful</i>
	Discrimination; 1 (12.5 %)
Aggregation ; 2 (13.3%)	<i>Seek treatment</i>
<i>Community</i> <i>World</i>	Place of origin; 1 (12.5 %)
Discrimination; 4 (26.7%)	<i>Italians</i>
<i>Fault</i> <i>Minority</i>	Copula <i>be</i> ; 1 (12.5%)
<i>Shadow</i>	Sexual Orientation; 2 (25%)
Opinion/ Judgement; 1 (6.7%)	<i>Lesbians</i> <i>Transgender</i>
<i>Opinion</i>	
Religion; 1 (6.7%)	
<i>Seminary</i>	
Person/Subject; 1 (6.7%)	
<i>I/Me</i>	
Sexual Orientation; 1 (6.7%)	
<i>Bisexual</i>	

Figure 4. Semantic categories of the collocates of nominal *omosessual+* and *gay* in the Tempi Corpus

Nominal *omosessual+*, on the other hand, seems to be related once again to a more ‘personal’ nuance. This can be inferred by focusing on some of the nouns in concordance with nominal *omosessual+*. “Fault,” “community,” “parents,” and “world” are all used in the same structure with nominal *omosessual+* in the genitive case: “colpa degli omosessuali” (“homosexuals” fault), “genitori di omosessuali” (“homosexuals” parents), “comunità degli omosessuali” (“homosexuals” community”) and “mondo degli omosessuali” (“homosexuals” world”). Nominal *gay* is never used in this type of construct. Moreover, another collocate that seems to confirm this is “I” in the sentence “I, a homosexual, will be in that square.” The sentence is again taken from the article concerning the Family Day, and the writer is a Catholic gay man in favor of the demonstration, disregarded by the majority of the gay Italian population (Ponte, 2016). Once

again, the collocates seem to suggest a preference in use for *omosessual+* for gay individuals abiding to the homonormativity required by the Catholic church, i.e., gay people who still defend the traditional family and take sides against surrogates and other alternative forms of family. Once again, this seems to support the interpretation that Tempi constructs heteronormative, conservative discourses by using *gay* and *omosessual+* in ways that delegitimize the claims of the gay community and the discourse associated with them. This is achieved by either reducing gay matters to an individual sphere (as the use of *omosessual+* has shown), which, in turn, takes the focus away from socio-political issues (such as the legitimization of the Civil Unions), or by presenting the Other as something not belonging in Italy (as the use of *gay* has indicated). In so doing, Tempi marginalizes, and thus reduces, the power of queer liberation discourses.

***Omosessual+* and *gay* in the *Gay.it* corpus**

In the *Gay.it* corpus, the word *omosessual+* occurs 82 times, 53 of which include the adjectival form in concordance with 18 nouns (64.6%), and 29 of which include the nominal form (35.4%); the term *gay* occurred 95 times in the *Gay.it* corpus,³ and 70 of its instances involved the adjectival form accompanying 26 different nouns (73.7%), while 25 instances involved the nominal form (26.3%). At a first glance, *gay* is used more frequently in this corpus, especially as an adjective.

Adjectival omosessual+* and *gay

Figure 5 shows the different collocates for adjectival *omosessual+* and *gay*, with an English translation and the frequency of each collocate in the *Gay.it* corpus.

The picture Figure 5 provides differs from the patterns discernible in the Tempi corpus. Here, *omosessual+* is used mainly in collocation with “couple(s)” (almost 50% of the adjectival collocations). Furthermore, while in the Tempi corpus both terms were in concordance with “couple” rather evenly, in *Gay.it* there is a major gap in usage, with “couple” collocating with adjectival *gay* only 5 times. An analysis of other words in proximity to the phrases *coppia/e omosessuale/i* (homosexual couple[s]) and *coppia/e gay* (gay couple[s]) revealed how both mainly emerged in discourses concerning politics and the 76/2016 Bill– “right(s)” was one of the most common collocates for both. Despite this similarity, *coppie omosessuali* was more frequently used when the news were citing, quoting, or interviewing politicians, experts and economists. This might suggest a preference of the adjective *omosessual+* for professional and formal settings, which could be pointing to a difference in register between *omosessual+* and *gay*. This seems to be supported by the data in the corpus. For adjectival *omosessual+* in concordance with “couple(s),” a large amount of formal terms and legal jargon was encountered, with words/phrases such as *porre un quesito* (formal Italian for “ask a question”), *adozione coparentale* (formal term for the English borrowing “stepchild adoption”), *parificare* (legal verb for “make equivalent”). On the other side, adjectival *gay* is, for example, in concordance with *papà*, a very informal and affective term for “daddy.” Another commonly shared term, *artisti* (artists), might indicate the same point. In *artisti omosessuali* (homosexual artists), the adjective is in proximity of terms such as *editoriale* (“editorial”) and *direttore* (“director”), more technical.⁴ The same pattern could be partly verified for “(Civil Unions),” for which all the instances of adjectival *omosessual+* were connected to news with a

political or technical focus. The data thus show how, throughout the corpus, *omosessual+* is preferred for instances of political, technical, or formal discourses.

Gay.it Corpus					
Adjectival <i>Omosessual+</i> (53)			Adjectival <i>Gay</i> (70)		
Collocate	Translation	Frequency	Collocate	Translation	Frequency
Coppia/e#	Couple(s)	23	Unioni#	Unions	8
Matrimoni(o)@	Wedding(s)	5	Icon+*	Icon(s)	6
Unione/i#	Union(s)	4	Amic+#	Friend(s)	5
Persone*	People	3	Coppia/e#	Couple(s)	5
Amici#	Friends	2	Matrimoni(o)@	Wedding(s)	5
Amore@	Love	2	Mondo*	World	5
Famiglia@	Family	2	Comunità#	Community	4
Natura*	Nature	2	Adozion+*	Adoption(s)	3
Artisti@	Artists	1	Amore@	Love	3
Unioni Civili#	Civil Unions	1	Cultura*	Culture	3
Compagno/a*	Partner	1	Famigli+@	Family(es)	3
Comunità#	Community	1	Papà*	Daddy	3
Concittadini*	Fellow-citizens	1	Artisti@	Artists	2
Familiare*	Relative	1	Locali*	Clubs/Bars	2
Giovani*	The youngs	1	Pubblico*	Audience	2
Relazioni*	Relationships	1	Ballerini*	Ballet dancers	1
Scrittore*	Writer	1	Coro*	Choir	1
Senatori*	Senators	1	Cugino*	Cousin	1
			Droghe*	Drugs	1
			Festino*	Party	1
			Genitori*	Parents	1
			Insegnante*	Teacher	1
			Movimento*	Movement	1
			Nozze*	Matrimony	1
			Pro-gay*	Pro-gay	1
			Youtuber*	Youtuber	1

Note. Similar collocates between the two terms are marked by @; collocates that appear with different frequency are marked by #; unique collocates are marked by *

Figure 5. Collocates frequency of adjectival *omosessual+* and *gay* in the Gay.it corpus

Looking at the unique collocates, adjectival *gay* is used for a wider variety of contexts, especially the arts (“ballet dancers,” “audience,” “choir”), culture/society (“icon” in the formulaic and established expression *icona gay*, gay icon; “youtuber,” and the word “culture” itself), and generally leisure and entertainment (“clubs,” “party”). *Omosessual+* is largely in collocation with terms related to the political debate and especially the issues concerning *le famiglie arcobaleno*, “the rainbow families,” a phrase found in the corpus. Furthermore, most of *omosessual+* collocates are from articles concerning the Bill proposed by Monica Cirinnà or news concerning religious debates, which, once again, are topics which often find their formal articulation in ‘official’ or technical discourses.

Figure 6 shows the collocates of adjectival *omosessual+* and *gay* grouped according to semantic categories. At a first glance, the number of shared categories is larger for the Gay.it corpus, which might suggest a less polarized use of the two terms and, in turn, a more fluid interchange between them. A semantic prosody analysis confirmed this, with a general positive polarity for both adjectives but also instances of neutral and negative semantic prosody. Despite the absence of a clear divide, there are elements of difference that could broaden the scope of the analysis. For example, even though the familial category shows a wider variety of collocates for adjectival *gay*, the frequency of this category is greater for *omosessual+* (69.8% vs. 42.8%), confirming what was argued for in the analysis of Figure 5, i.e. a distribution of adjectival *omosessual+* collocates almost only across news related to the religious-political debate of the time.

This tendency is visible in other semantic categories as well. “Citizens,” in the “aggregation” category, is from a piece of news concerning same sex marriage; the three instances of “people,” in the “people” category, were found in three articles, two a report of a Parliament session and the other a reported interview of a politician (“Unioni civili,” 2016b; “Unioni civili,” 2016a; “Formigoni,” 2016). Instances of *amore omosessuale* (homosexual love) and *relazioni omosessuali* (homosexual relationships), in the “love” semantic category for adjectival *omosessual+*, do not follow the same behavior, but they were all registered as part of a single piece of news, an interview to a writer who never used the term *gay*, only *omosessual+* multiple times (Grasso, 2016b). The *gay*-exclusive “culture/society” semantic category provided insight for the analysis in two parallel directions: a) the corpus focus is not entirely on the political issue of Civil Unions (which was more the case for the Tempi corpus), and it thus depicts homosexuality as encompassing more aspects of people’s everyday life; b) whereas *omosessual+* is used as characterizing more ‘official’ discourses, *gay* is used to define concepts closer to the queer pop-culture in Italy. Point (b) confirms the difference in register associated with the choice of the two terms found in the corpus, and it corroborates the claims made in the previous section of the paper, i. e., that *gay* is used as central linguistic element in the counter-discourse against heteronormative discourse. Differently from the Tempi corpus, where the nature of *gay* as constituent of a counter-discourse of liberation was mocked and denigrated to reabsorb it into more heteronormative boundaries, in Gay.it the same counter-discourse is enriched with a wider range of socio-cultural topics to make it more legitimate and multi-faceted.

Gay.it Corpus: common semantic categories		Gay.it Corpus: unique semantic categories	
Familial		Adjectival <i>Omosesual+</i>	Adjectival <i>Gay</i>
<i>Omosesual+</i> 23 (69.8%)	<i>Gay</i> 30 (42.8%)	Sexual Orientation 2 (3.8%)	Culture/ Society 16 (22.8%)
<i>Couple(s)</i> <i>Wedding(s)</i> <i>(Civil) Unions</i> <i>Family</i> <i>Partner</i> <i>Relative</i>	<i>(Civil) Unions</i> <i>Couple(s)</i> <i>Wedding(s)</i> <i>Adoption(s)</i> <i>Family</i> <i>Daddy</i> <i>Cousin</i> <i>Parents</i>	<i>Nature</i>	<i>Icon</i> <i>Clubs/Bars</i> <i>Audience</i> <i>Choir</i> <i>Party</i> <i>Culture</i> <i>Drugs</i>
Profession			
<i>Omosesual+</i> 3 (5.7%)	<i>Gay</i> 5 (7.1%)		
<i>Artists</i> <i>Writer</i> <i>Senators</i>	<i>Dancers</i> <i>Youtuber</i> <i>Teacher</i> <i>Artists</i>		
Aggregation			
<i>Omosesual+</i> 2 (3.8%)	<i>Gay</i> 11 (15.7%)		
<i>Community</i> <i>Citizens</i>	<i>World</i> <i>Community</i> <i>Movement</i> <i>Pro-gay</i>		
People			
<i>Omosesual+</i> 6 (11.3%)	<i>Gay</i> 5 (7.1%)		
<i>People</i> <i>Friends</i> <i>The youngs</i>	<i>Friend</i>		
Love			
<i>Omosesual+</i> 3 (5.7%)	<i>Gay</i> 3 (4.3%)		
<i>Love</i> <i>Relationships</i>	<i>Love</i>		

Figure 6. Semantic categories of the collocates of adjectival *omosessual+* and *gay* collocates in the Gay.it Corpus

Nominal *omosessual+* and *gay*

Nominal *omosessual+* and *gay* are used more frequently in Gay.it news, with 54 occurrences in total, whereas in the Tempi corpus *omosessual+* and *gay* were used by nouns a total of 23 times. The inherent nature of adjectives and nouns might reveal yet another aspect of the interplay of attitudes expressed by the two different news sources. Adjectives are, by definition, words

carrying the meaning of an attribute, with the function of describing or modifying a noun to which they are related. As such, they are hardly the major focus of a sentence. On the other hand, as entities modified by adjectives, nouns are frequently the focus of what is being talked about. A larger reliance on nominal *gay* and *homosexual* in the Gay.it corpus could thus be another indication of the different attitudes towards the topic of homosexuality in the corpora—Tempi tends to treat it as a more impersonal matter, a sub-category in the fixed, unchangeable and ‘natural’ (a word used quite frequently in the corpus) institution of the traditional family. In this perspective, gay people in particular, but all the different identities under the LGBTQIA+ community, risk being dehumanized and treated only as a political and religious matter. Conversely, the larger use of nominal *gay* and *homosexual* in Gay.it portrays gay people as actors and participants in society. This facet of the matter, as uncovered by the linguistic differences of adjectives and nouns, can be more closely analyzed by focusing on the individual collocates and the semantic categories they fall into, which can be found in Figures 7 and 8.

Figure 7 shows the collocates for nominal *omosessual+* and *gay* in Gay.it. Once again, as nouns, *omosessual+* is used more frequently than *gay*. In general, there is little overlap in terms of common collocates, but some could be identified. The first noticeable common collocate is *noi* (we, us), in both cases used in the phrase *noi omosessuali*, *noi gay* (us homosexuals, us gays). It is a clear indication of the different nature of the Gay.it corpus, comprised of news mainly produced by members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Once again, *noi omosessuali* is found in an economic news article rich in formal and technical terms (Grasso, 2016a). In contrast, *Noi gay*, though reported as uttered by an interviewed philosopher, is used by the interviewee in proximity to the terms *promiscui* (promiscuous, pl. adj.) and *sessu* (sex; Semenzato, 2016).

More varied is the landscape of unique collocates for each term. Firstly, *omosessual+* collocates with *bisessuali* (bisexuals) and *eterosessual+* (heterosexual[s]), while *gay* with *lesbic+* (lesbian[s]) and *etero* (straight). This partition could be due to linguistic reasons. In fact, it could have been a rhetorical choice of the journalists to respect the assonance of the root *-sessuale* within *omosessuale*, *eterosessuale*, and *bisessuale*, or the shortness of the terms *gay* and *etero* (even though it can be argued that *etero* is the less formal term for heterosexual, with *eterosessuale* being the more formal one). This might also indicate a better understanding of the linguistic practices associated with representing gay identities on the part of Gay.it. *Gay* is in fact paired with lesbian multiple times, showing how journalists for the Gay.it website are aware of the most recent practices of differentiating between gay (for gay men) and lesbian (for gay women), instead of using gay as an umbrella term to define sexual orientation for both sexes.

The analysis was furthered by grouping collocates according to semantic categories (Figure 8). As per the frequency of shared categories, *gay* is used more for terms related to sexual orientation and sex. Additionally, these two categories are used with a largely uniform positive semantic prosody, indicating an overall level of comfort on Gay.it in treating sex-related issues as only part of someone’s identity (as indicated also by the title of a news article: “*Gli omosessuali non sono solo ‘sessuali*,” (“Homosexuals are not just ‘sexuals.”), Semenzato, 2016). Once again, the familial category is more frequent with nominal *omosessual+*, collocating with terms such as

“marry,” “wedding,” and “sons/daughters” (Italian has a common word for both, *figli*, which is slightly more formal than the term “kids”).

Gay.it Corpus					
Nominal <i>Omosessual+</i> (29)			Nominal <i>Gay</i> (25)		
Collocate	Translation	Frequency	Collocate	Translation	Frequency
Eterosessual+*	Heterosexual(s)	4	Lesbic+*	Lesbian(s)	4
Figli+*	Son/Daughter(s)	3	Calcio*	Soccer	2
Uomini*	Men	2	Dichiarato/ Conclamato*	Open (not closeted)	2
Bisessuali*	Bisexuals	1	Essere@	Copula be	2
Cirinnà*	Cirinnà	1	Migliori amici*	Best friends	2
Chiesa*	Church	1	Minoranza*	Minority	2
Diritti*	Rights	1	Promiscui@	Promiscuous	2
Discriminazione*	Discrimination	1	Adozioni*	Adoptions	1
Giovane*	Young	1	Amo*	To love	1
Giurista*	Juror	1	Etero*	Straight	1
LGBT*	LGBT	1	Genitori*	Parents	1
Matrimonio*	Wedding	1	Giorni migliori*	Better days	1
Noi@	We	1	Gusto popolare*	Popular taste	1
Normali*	Normal/Regular	1	Noi@	We	1
Paura*	Fear	1	Papà*	Daddy	1
Promiscui@	Promiscuous	1	Showgirl*	Showgirl	1
Quarantenne*	40-year-old	1			
Sessantacinquenne*	65-year-old	1			
Sia@	Copula be	1			
Soddisfare*	To please (sexually)	1			
Sposerò*	Will marry	1			
Storia*	History	1			
Venticinquenne*	25-year-old	1			

Note. Similar collocates between the two terms are marked by @; unique collocates are marked by *

Figure 7. Collocates frequency of nominal *omosessual+* and *gay* in the Gay.it corpus

Gay.it Corpus: common semantic categories	
Sexual Orientation	
<i>Omosessual+</i> 5 (17.2%)	<i>Gay</i> 7 (28%)
<i>Heterosexual(s)</i> <i>Bisexuals</i>	<i>Lesbian(s)</i> <i>Straight</i> <i>Openly gay</i>
Familial	
<i>Omosessual+</i> 5 (17.2%)	<i>Gay</i> 3 (12%)
<i>Will marry</i> <i>Wedding</i> <i>Son(s)/Daughter(s)</i>	<i>Parents</i> <i>Adoption</i> <i>Daddy</i>
Discrimination	
<i>Omosessual+</i> 3 (10.3%)	<i>Gay</i> 3 (12%)
<i>Normal</i> <i>Fear</i> <i>Discrimination</i>	<i>Minority</i> <i>Perverted</i>
Sex	
<i>Omosessual+</i> 2 (6.9%)	<i>Gay</i> 2 (8%)
<i>Promiscuous</i> <i>To please</i>	<i>Promiscuous</i>
Aggregation	
<i>Omosessual+</i> 2 (6.9%)	<i>Gay</i> 2 (8%)
<i>Noi</i> <i>LGBT</i>	<i>Best friend(s)</i>
Culture/Society	
<i>Omosessual+</i> 1 (3.4%)	<i>Gay</i> 4 (16%)
<i>History</i>	<i>Popular taste</i> <i>Showgirl</i>
Copula <i>be</i>	
<i>Omosessual+</i> 1 (3.4%)	<i>Gay</i> 2 (8%)

Tempi Corpus: unique semantic categories	
Adjectival <i>Omosessual+</i>	Adjectival <i>Gay</i>
People 3 (10.3%)	Love 1 (4%)
<i>Men/Women</i> <i>Young person</i>	<i>Amo</i>
Age 3 (10.3%)	Other 1 (4%)
<i>25-year-old</i> <i>40-year-old</i> <i>65-year-old</i>	<i>Better days</i>
Politics 3 (10.3%)	
<i>Cirinnà</i> <i>Rights</i> <i>Juror</i>	
Religion 1 (3.4%)	
<i>Church</i>	

Figure 8. Semantic categories of the collocates of nominal *omosessual+* and *gay* in the Gay.it corpus

It is important to mention the concordance of *gay* and *papà* (“daddy, pops, dad”), once again a more informal (and affectionate) term. The “culture/society” category shows a large imbalance in terms of frequency, (16% for *gay* and 3.4% for *omosessuale*), and it falls into the pattern discussed above of *omosessual+* deriving its meaning from more ‘official’ discourses and a preference for a more formal register, here indicated by its collocating with *storia* (history),

whereas *gay* identifies discourses more centered on pop-cultural and informal topics, with collocates such as *gusto popolare* (popular taste) and *showgirl* (a borrowed term from English).

The unique semantic categories show additional evidence supporting the general, underlying pattern of nominal (and adjectival) preference according to discourse reflected in register. Unique categories of *omosessual+* are in fact related to politics and religion (high register, formal categories, ‘official’ discourse), among others, with terms such as “juror,” “Church,” “rights,” and “Cirinnà.” A common trait running through both corpora is the high prevalence of collocations for *omosessual+* and terms related to the “person/people” category. In the Gay.it corpus, this point is evidenced by the terms “men/women,” “young person,” with the “age” category, tightly related to the “person/people” category, represented as a personal trait (“the 25-year-old homosexual,” “the 40-year-old homosexual,” and “the 60-year-old homosexual”).

Once again, aside from differences in use for the two nominal terms, it is clear how the Gay.it corpus provides a more multi-faceted, varied depiction of homosexuality, one which embraces several sides of one’s life. Aside from categories absent from the Tempi corpus, such as “culture/society,” individual collocates in shared categories, such as “daddy” in the familial one, or “LGBT” and “us” in the “aggregation” category, not present in the Tempi corpus, work to forge a counter discourse vis-a-vis the heteronormative one, which promotes a positive, warmer vision of homosexuality, shared and expressed through the news by people that proudly belong to that community.

Tempi and Gay.it corpora: Summary of the findings

The analysis of the two corpora resulted in an in-depth, layered depiction of the relationship between *omosessual+* and *gay* in the Italian language. Linguistically, the opposite attitudes expressed in the corpora towards queer realities and the institutionalization of Civil Unions resulted in a different usage of *omosessual+* and *gay* that reflect the competing interplay of different, opposing discourses.

1) A more negative attitude concerning homosexuality in the Tempi corpus was reflected in specific linguistic choices that, together, uncovered the following implicit political agendas:

- *Tempi* is more focused on just the matter at hand, and consequently more concerned with political, familial and religious topics/news. Limiting the thematic and semantic range of homosexuality to these spheres limits its general scope, negating gay people, and all the other components of the LGBTQIA+ community, the entire spectrum of emotions, values, social engagement, etc., associated with heterosexuality. It also binds the discussion to religious terms, which, implicitly refrains the Church’s view that the traditional family is the only acceptable one.
- *Tempi* is more polarized in the usage of *omosessual+* and *gay*, with clear dichotomies that contrasts local vs. foreign and (hetero- and homo-)normative vs. subversive practices. In this view, *gay* is the subversive term, representing the foreign practices of same-sex marriage and the stepchild adoption. It also reflects the Catholic rhetoric around and against the ‘gender theory’ and its disruptive agenda towards traditional institutions. In contrast, adjectival

and nominal *omosessual+* were more related to personal features of homosexuality, in a quasi-reactionary attempt to represent it as more private matter, and thus less threatening to the status quo. This reflects the homonormative view that the Catholic church holds towards homosexuality. Lastly, this more polarized use nullifies the socio-political force of the counter-discourse expressed by the term *gay*, associated with the liberation movement in the United States, thus denigrating it and casting it as a general Other.

2) In contrast, a more positive attitude towards LGBTQIA+ issues in the Gay.it corpus appears to be linked to other linguistic choices that support the following implicit agendas:

- *Depiction of a more vivid and varied reality* for queer individuals. References to the arts, culture, sports and entertainment can be seen as a purposeful attempt to self-determination and affirmation, especially in collocation with *gay* and *omosessual+*. Words related to love, mainly *amore* (love), are also present, both in instances of *amore gay* and *amore omosessuale*. A wider variety of contexts in which the two words are used, together with a greater variety of linguistic categories involved (nouns and adjectives), showed a general confidence in using the two terms in the Gay.it corpus, which is hardly a surprise, due to the very nature of the news website.
- *A less polarized distinction between omosessual+ and gay*, which caused a more fluid, and thus harder to detect interchange between the two terms. The meaning attached to *omosessual+* and *gay* is not generally centered on the dynamic normative vs. subversive as it was the case for Tempi. Nonetheless, a differentiation in terms of authors' construction of discourses could be found, with *omosessual+* utilized for more formal and technical discourses (politics and religion among others), and *gay* associated with more intimate, informal, pop-cultural (and sometimes trivial) topics. This clearly shows a different use of the counter discourse against the hegemonic one expressed in heteronormative nuances by the Tempi corpus. Whereas in Tempi the counter discourse was delegitimized and diminished, in Gay.it it is endorsed and fully characterized with a larger selection of topics

The analysis above clearly questions the superficial and limited semantic portrait for *gay* and *omosessuale* expressed in the Italian dictionaries (major linguistic behemoths such as Zingarelli and Treccani included), which clearly ignores the different attitudes that might prompt people to use the two words differently and for different agendas, and the role of specific terms in building discourses foregrounding different, and in this case, opposite, *Weltanschauungen*.

Discussion and Conclusion

The investigation of the rich and complex semantic and linguistic landscape in the two corpora demonstrated how different attitudes and world-views resulted in non-uniform usage of the terms *omosessual+* and *gay* (Kay and Kempton, 1984). These attitudes are reflected, especially in the Tempi corpus, in deliberate linguistic choices that involve the borrowed term *gay*. Although the term is fully integrated in the Italian language, its phonetic and pronunciation clearly single it out as a foreign word, specifically from the English language. The behavior of *gay* in the Tempi corpus demonstrates how the borrowing of a foreign word is never a neutral process, it is

contextualized in the particular realities and linguistic environments where it takes place. In the Italian case, *gay* came into widespread usage in the late 80s to describe gay men in particular, after the re-appropriation of the term by the LGBTQIA+ community in the United States. Despite being in full circulation since then, it is clear how different groups of people still use it in separate ways to construct opposite and competing discourses. Far from being neutral, the borrowing of *gay* by the Catholic-leaning corpus brings with it a clear political agenda, which could have a serious and tangible negative turnout in the everyday life of part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

As political, social, and cultural beings, teachers too have a responsibility to be aware of the social implications embedded in the use of foreign or borrowed words. Students have to be made aware of the nuanced coloring of different word choices and their consequences. In terms of teaching implications, this study can further inform teaching in other several ways: as a classroom practice, it can be useful to know the difference in usage and context of the two analyzed words in order to be able to provide an explanation to students who might be interested in the topic. However, I believe the most meaningful implications have to be found beyond the scope of the research itself. Conducting corpus-based analyses such as the present one provides teachers with a better understanding of the importance of the subtle messages that run underneath the words. It is important that students are made aware of the different contexts and uses in which certain words are generally used, and corpus linguistics proves to be a meaningful tool in that regard (Zhang, 2009). From the point of view of what the teacher actually says in class, a greater awareness of the power of language engrained in the choice of certain words might prevent teachers from negatively influencing learners, as it has been demonstrated how semantic prosody, and especially, its misuse, can be an important factor in the biasing of a class, or even the society as a whole (Hauser & Schwartz, 2018; Soto-Almela & Alcaraz-Mármol, 2017). Lastly, as per the second goal of the present research, this study hopes to pave the way to further academic research on QL in Italy, and to afford teachers with a critical set of tools, knowledge, and new awareness, in order to challenge normative discourses that are being reproduced in the classroom to the detriment of certain students (Paiz, 2017; Curran, 2006; Ó'Móchain, 2006).

This study could have benefited from a larger collection of news articles spanning through more months. An increase in data would have led to a more robust analysis of the phenomenon, especially given that each of the two news sources in the analyzed corpora were written by a set of four to seven rotating reporters, thus representing a very small number of Italian users. Furthermore, it would have proven insightful to add a third news archive, especially one of a neutral newspaper. Lastly, the analysis would have resulted in a more significant outcome if it had included several words that were omitted, such as “lesbian” and the widely used euphemism “same-sex” (sometimes found in English as well). More research would help to shed further light on the understudied topic of QL in Italian and other languages.

Endnotes

1. “Heteronormative” as defined by Merriam-Webster: “of, relating to, or based on the attitude that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality” (Heteronormative, 2019).

2. “Homonormativity is the assimilation of heteronormative ideals and constructs into homosexual culture and individual identity. It refers to politics that do not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions such as monogamy, procreation and binary gender roles” (Homonormativity, 2015).
3. Sixty two instances of *gay* in fixed phrases and proper names were removed from the analysis, such as “gay pride,” “Gay Village,” “gay street,” and Gay.it. While these instances constitute interesting and valuable data, as fixed phrases and terms that cannot be used with the term *omosessual+*, they have been excluded from the present analysis to not skew the data.
4. At the same time, the choice between *gay* and *omosessual+* could be rhetorical. Both instances are in fact encountered in a title and a subtitle of a piece of news. The title contains the phrase *tre generazioni di artisti gay* (three generations of gay artists), while the subtitle has a similar *tre generazioni di artisti omosessuali a confronto* (comparing three generations of homosexual artists). Titles are usually supposed to be shorter, which might have prompted the writer to use *gay*. And the choice of *omosessual+* in the subtitle could be derived by a reluctance of the Italian language to resort to repetition.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Justin Pannell for his insightful and constructive suggestions on an earlier version of this paper. Any remaining errors are mine.

References

- Anthony, L. (2019). AntConc (Version 3.5.8) [Computer Software]. Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University. Available from <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>
- Amicone, L. (2016, February 15). Ddl Cirinnà e utero in affitto. Il mercato ha bisogno di noi. *Tempi*. Retrieved from <https://www.tempi.it/ddl-cirinna-e-utero-in-affitto-il-mercato-ha-bisogno-di-noi/>
- Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C., Khosravini, M., Krzyzanowski, M., McEnery, T., & Wodak, R. (2008). A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press, *Discourse and Society*, 19(3), 273–306.
- Boffi, E. (2016, February 29). Come si dovrebbe dare la notizia su Vendola. *Tempi*. Retrieved from <https://www.tempi.it/come-si-dovrebbe-dare-la-notizia-su-vendola/>
- Cameron, D. (2005). Language, gender, and sexuality: Current issues and new directions, *Applied linguistics* 26(4), 482–502.
- Curran, G. (2006). Responding to students’ normative questions about gays: Putting queer theory into practice in an Australian ESL class, *Journal of language, identity and education*, 5(1), 85–96.
- De Lucia, D. (2015). *Il gergo gay italiano. Il novecento e gli anni duemila*. Italy: Edizioni Accademiche Italiane.
- Desagulier, G. (2014). Visualizing distances in a set of near-synonyms—Rather, quite, fairly, and pretty. In D. Glynn & J. A. Robinson (Eds.), *Corpus methods for semantics* (pp. 145–178). Amsterdam, NL: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Edmonds, P., & Hirst, G. (2001). Near-synonymy and lexical choice, *Computational linguistics*, 28(2), DOI: 10.1162/089120102760173625.

- Farina, R. (2016, March 29). Quando il pregiudizio è “cristianofobo” non si scandalizza nessuno. *Tempi*. Retrieved from <https://www.tempi.it/prejudizio-cristianofobo-non-si-scandalizza-nessuno/>
- Formigoni: esponiamoci tutti contro la sua omofobia (2016, February 8). *Gay.it*. Retrieved from <https://www.gay.it/attualita/news/formigoni-esponiamoci-tutti-contro-la-sua-omofobia>
- Garbagnoli, S. (2016). Against the heresy of immanence: Vatican’s “Gender” as a new rhetorical device against the denaturalization of the sexual order, *Religion and gender*, 6(2), DOI:<https://doi.org/10.18352/rg.10156>.
- Gay. (2017). In *Treccani dizionario della lingua italiana*. Retrieved from <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/gay/>
- Giovanardi, C. (2016, February 8). Ci spieghi questa tabella e questi prezzi, senatore Lo Giudice. *Tempi*. Retrieved from <https://www.tempi.it/ci-spieghi-questa-tabella-e-questi-prezzi-senatore-lo-giudice/>
- Grasso, I. (2016a, February 4). Simone Racioppo, stilista per star italiane, su moda e diritti. *Gay.it*. Retrieved from <https://www.gay.it/attualita/news/intervista-simone-racioppo-stilista-gay-moda-diritti-lgbt>
- Grasso, I. (2016b, February 23). Intervista a Eduardo Savarese, magistrato e scrittore omosessuale. *Gay.it*. Retrieved from <https://www.gay.it/attualita/news/intervista-a-eduardo-savarese-magistrato-scrittore-omosessuale>
- Gu, B. (2017). Corpus-based study of two synonyms—Obtain and gain, *Sino-US English teaching* 14(8), 511–522, DOI:10.17265/1539-8072/2017.08.006
- Guarneri, D. (2016, May 23). Tutti i costi e le assurdità delle unioni civili. *Tempi*. Retrieved from <https://www.tempi.it/tutti-i-costi-e-le-assurdita-delle-unioni-civili/>
- Hauser, D. J., & Schwarz, N. (2018). How seemingly innocuous words can bias judgment: Semantic prosody and impression formation, *Journal of experimental social psychology*, 75, 11–18.
- Heteronormative. (2019). In *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heteronormative>
- Homonormativity. (2015). In *Positive Space Network Wayback Machine Archive* (University of Victoria). Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20150702182226/http://web.uvic.ca/psn/resources/terminology/homonormativity/>
- Kay, P., & Kempton, W. (1984). What is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? *American anthropologist*, 86, 65–79.
- Li, E. (2019). A Corpus-assisted study of synonyms in EFL Teaching: Take preserve and conserve as examples, *Linguistics and Literature Studies* 7(2), 39–50, DOI: 10.13189/lls.2019.070201.
- Love, R., & Baker, P. (2015). The hate that dare not speak its name? *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 3(1), 57–86.

- Milani, T. M. (2013). Are “queers” really “queer”? Language, identity and same-sex desire in a South African online community, *Discourse & Society*, 24(5), 615–633, DOI: 10.1177/0957926513486168
- Motschenbacher, H., & Stegu, M. (2013). Queer Linguistic approaches to discourse, *Discourse and society* 24(5), 519–535, DOI: 10.1177/0957926513486069.
- O’Leary, D. (2006) *Maschi o femmine? La guerra del genere*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino Editore.
- Ó’Móchain, R. (2006). Discussing gender and sexuality in a context-appropriate way: Queer narratives in an EFL college classroom in Japan, *Journal of language, identity, and education*, 5(1), 51–66.
- Omosessuale. (2017). In *Treccani dizionario della lingua italiana*. Retrieved from <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/omosessuale/>
- Paiz, J. (2017). Queering ESL teaching: Pedagogical and materials creation issues, *Tesol Journal*, 9(2), 348–367.
- Ponte, G. (2016, January 30). Lettera ai partecipanti al Family day. «Noi, chiamati a fare la differenza». *Tempi*. Retrieved from <https://www.tempi.it/lettera-partecipanti-family-day/>
- Semenzato, A. (2016, February 3). Galimberti pro LGBT: “Gli omosessuali non sono solo “sessuali”!” *Gay.it*. Retrieved from <https://www.gay.it/attualita/video/galimberti-pro-lgbt-gli-omosessuali-non-sono-solo-sessuali>
- Soto-Almela, J., & Alcaraz-Mármol, G. (2017). Comparing the portrayal of immigration in two Spanish newspapers: a semantic prosody analysis, *Onomázein* (38), 147–168.
- Sullivan, N. (2003). *A critical introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York University Press.
- Unioni civili: riassunto del secondo giorno alla Camera (2016a, May 10). *Gay.it*. Retrieved from <https://www.gay.it/attualita/news/unioni-civili-riassunto-secondo-giorno>
- Unioni civili: riassunto del primo giorno alla Camera (2016b, May 11). *Gay.it*. Retrieved from <https://www.gay.it/attualita/news/unioni-civili-riassunto-primo-giorno-camera>
- Watson, K. (2005). Queer theory, *Group Analysis*, 38(1), 67–81, DOI:10.1177/0533316405049369.
- Xiao, R., & Mecenery, T. (2006). Collocation, semantic prosody, and near synonymy: A cross-linguistic perspective, *Applied Linguistics* 27(1), 103–129, DOI: 10.1093/applin/ami045
- Zhang, W. (2009). Semantic prosody and ESL/EFL vocabulary pedagogy, *TESL Canada Journal*, 26(2), 1–12.

About the author:

Matteo Socciarelli is a graduate student in the MA TESOL program at Hawaii Pacific University. He has recently begun to focus his research interest in Queer Theory and its implication for the TESOL field.