

“Ethnic Replacement”. Unfortunate Expression or Unacceptable Supremacism? An Interdisciplinary Approach to a Case Study in Italian Political Discourse

Abstract: On April 19, 2023, Italian newspapers published an article titled “Meno migranti, più figli. No alla sostituzione etnica” (“Fewer migrants, more children. No to ethnic replacement”), based on statements made by the Italian Minister of Agriculture, Francesco Lollobrigida. This gained immediate traction in the Anglophone foreign press, with *The Telegraph* publishing an article on the same day: “Italy risks ‘ethnic replacement’ because of low birth rate and high immigration, says minister”. This study analyzes comments from April 19–26 on Italian and English digital news outlets and the related social media profiles. The perspective is strongly interdisciplinary, approaching the collection and study of journalistic data from both communicative and linguistic viewpoints, comparing occurrences in Italian and English. A pedagogical evaluation of the role of language in describing migration dynamics and their socio-cultural implications completes the picture, suggesting interventions to enhance awareness and self-awareness of communicative strategies.

Keywords: “*sostituzione etnica*”, *Great Replacement*, *Italian political discourse*, *social media discourse analysis*, *Hate Speech*

1. Introduction

On April 19, 2023, *La Repubblica* (pp. 1–2), along with other Italian newspapers including *Il Sole 24 Ore* and *Il Messaggero*, published an article titled “Meno migranti, più figli. No alla sostituzione etnica” (“Fewer migrants, more children. No to ethnic replacement”), based on statements made by the Italian Minister of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry Francesco Lollobrigida. His statement had immediate resonance in the Anglophone foreign press: among others, *The Telegraph* published an article on the same day: “Italy risks ‘ethnic replacement’ because of low birth rate and high immigration, says minister”. This paper will analyze comments in the timespan April 19–26, 2023, posted on Italian and English digital news outlets and their related social media profiles.

For the purposes of the Social Media (henceforth SM) analysis, Jakobson’s model of language functions can be successfully applied as a tool for the understanding of the reception of the same news in Italian SM compared to the English one. On one hand, the addresser (sender) perspective illuminates the content and the quality of vocabulary used in political discourse (see sections 2 and 3); on the other hand, the addressee (receiver) perspective shows the issues related to media literacy and education (see section 4). The most important outcome concerns the difference among addressees (receivers) both in receiving news and in making judgements on the basis of cultural context(s). In particular, in a comparative perspective, it is not trivial to observe that English addressees, instantiated

¹ Although the contents of this article have been widely discussed by the authors, Elena Guerra (Università di Verona) authored section 2, Stella Merlin (Università di Napoli Federico II) authored section 3 with its subsections, Marta Milani (Università di Verona) authored section 4. All three authors wrote sections 1 and 5. We wish to acknowledge Alberto Manco and Giuseppina Scotto di Carlo, as well as all the convenors and the participants of the Naples conference for their scientific insights. We thank Francesco Meledandri for his support in managing digital data. We thank the editors for accepting our paper into the series.

by the Anglophone users of SM, do not necessarily know, or only have a superficial knowledge of, the specific addresser’s perspective in the effective pragmatic creation of the linguistic content.

This paper, which combines methodologies and theories pertaining to media education, linguistics, and pedagogy, is structured as follows: after providing a contextualization of hate speech in European regulations (section 2), a corpus of data retrieved from both Italian and English digital news outlets is presented and linguistically analyzed (section 3); then, a pedagogical evaluation to describe hate speech processes and define possible solutions (section 4) is envisaged. In the final remarks, some general claims are made on the basis of the overall discussion of the case study and the different approaches involved, particularly highlighting the importance of education to prevent hate speech-related language events (section 5).

2. Hate Speech in Social Media Discourse and Complex Societies

We are living in a complex and increasingly interdependent contemporary society. The popularization of the Internet and media that allow us to reach huge audiences in real time enable us to come in contact with a bulk of multimodal information (in terms of images, videos, and photos) that are often difficult to decode because of the nature of the medium itself. These media are perceived as fast and distracting devices, contributing to make all areas of life more fluid.²

In its essence, globalization is certainly a unifying though conflicting phenomenon. As the world has become more and more interconnected, it has also resulted in increasing division.³ We live in the age of “nowist” culture and hurried culture,⁴ characterized by an (obsessive) search for something new, the renegotiation of meaning or fundamental references. Today’s liquid-modern consumer society is inhabited by the shift from linear time to pointillist time.⁵

Thanks to smartphones and large-scale use of the internet, a permanently connected society allows the rapid sharing of images, news, videos, and comments that can bring people closer together with a wealth of information and stories; at the same time, it can also alienate, reinforce stereotypes and prejudices, and spread hateful and discriminatory messages.

Worldwide, six out of ten people are present and interact on online platforms and use the Internet in general. The number of active users on social media has risen to more than 5 billion, accounting for about 60% of the world’s population, which according to official United Nations’ estimates has surpassed 8 billion people.⁶ According to the study, compared to last year, the number has increased by 5.6%, exceeding the 0.9% increase in the world’s population. The most populous social network is Meta’s Facebook with 2.19 billion users. Instagram, also owned by Meta, follows with 1.65 billion users.

A direct consequence of the spread of personal media intertwines with media education, which continuously studies and reflects on the use of mass media and language inclusively and open to change, as well as media literacy to counter the spread of hate speech (Unesco, 2022⁷; Council of Europe, 2020⁸). These are the main challenges of those who use words with different aims. As

² Agostino Portera, *Educazione e pedagogia interculturale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2022).

³ Edgar Morin, *I sette saperi necessari all’educazione del futuro* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2001), 69.

⁴ Stephen Bertman, *Hyperculture: The Human Cost of Speed* (Westport: Praeger, 1998).

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernità liquida* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2016).

⁶ This was reported in a study by the monitoring company *Meltwater* and the agency *We are Social* in January 2024.

⁷ Nicole Fournier-Sylvester, *Addressing hate speech: educational responses* (UNESCO, United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, 2022).

⁸ Martina Chapman and Markus Oermann, *Supporting quality journalism through media and information literacy* (Council of Europe, 2020).

Wittgenstein put it “the limits of my language are the limits of my world”, or for Bauman if two people have the same experience, “a *eu colon* would include in the list primarily the occurrences he/she considers good and well, while a *dis colon* would focus on what he/she found disparaging and off-putting”.⁹

The “global village” that McLuhan predicted has definitely come true, highlighting human reactions that often do not focus on positive and constructive sharing processes but seem to be directed toward closure and preservation:

As we begin to react in depth to the social life and problems of our global village, we become reactionaries. Involvement that goes with our instant technologies transforms the most “socially conscious” people into conservatives. When Sputnik had first gone into orbit a schoolteacher asked her second-graders to write some verse of the subject. One child wrote: The stars are so big/ The earth is so small/ Stay as you are.¹⁰

The online system and social network environments open the virtual space to the world of readers. Platforms such as X/Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn have increasingly shortened the gap between readers of online news. Sometimes the perception about a phenomenon is very different from reality. For example, in Italy the population with a migration background as of January 1, 2023, is 5 million, 8.6% of population.¹¹ Though the widespread perception would consider an overestimated presence of immigrants in a country (see EURISPES 2018¹²), there are also instances of reversed attitudes towards this phenomenon. According to a web questionnaire administered in February 2019 to 1,196 high school students (age range: 13–20) on the presence of immigrants in Italy, only 12.8 percent of respondents provided the correct figure, while the most representative group (28.6 percent) believed that this number is between 500 thousand and 1 million, greatly underestimating the real number.¹³

If we compare spoken and written language forms diachronically, as Italian journalist and writer Sergio Lepri¹⁴ reminds us, journalism has also been – as a mirror of a changing society – one of the causes of the great linguistic change that has characterized our country in recent decades. It represented an important medium (followed by radio and television and later trailed by the diffusion of the Internet) for the development of a more unified and more modern language; it has been a disseminator of culture, although often of a superficial and approximate nature.

In telling the realities and societies, journalism is much more dynamic than its narrative, as the latter adapts to reality more slowly. This narrative is fueled by politicians who have speculated on the alleged invasion of foreigners.¹⁵

News and their related comments run even faster online through social networks, tools of dissemination, and wherever users share such information flow. Without underestimating the role of news sites, politicians, and opinion leaders¹⁶ the reworking that individual users do of biases between

⁹ Zygmunt Bauman et al. *Education and Intercultural Identity: A Dialogue between Zygmunt Bauman and Agostino Portera* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).

¹⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London and New York: Routledge, 1964), 43.

¹¹ IDOS, *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2023* (Roma: Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, 2023).

¹² Eurispes. Istituto di Studi Politici, Economici e Sociali, *Rapporto Italia*, 30th ed., Roma, 2018.

¹³ Nunziata Ribecco et al., “What Influences the Perception of Immigration in Italian Adolescents? An Analysis with CUB Models for Rating Data”, *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*, 82 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.seps.2022.101295>.

¹⁴ Sergio Lepri, *Scrivere bene e farsi capire. Manuale di linguaggio per chi lavora nel mondo della comunicazione* (Torino: Gutenberg 2000, 1988).

¹⁵ Maurizio Corte and Elena Guerra, “I Media nella gestione dei conflitti e nella mediazione”, in Alberto Teodoldi et al., *Manuale di Negoziazione e Mediazione* (Bologna: Zanichelli Editore, 2024).

¹⁶ Stefano Pasta, *Razzismi 2.0. Analisi socio-educativa dell'odio online* (Brescia: Scholé, 2018).

comments, shares, ‘likes’ and posts is striking. This attitude should be read within a meeting point between some trends of social networking 2.0: the use of new media as a tool to support one’s own social network, to analyze the social identity of other network members.

The major Web companies already claimed to take action against hate speech: YouTube explicitly bans it, Facebook bans it but allows messages with “clear humorous and satirical purposes” that “might otherwise be considered possible threats or attacks,” while X/Twitter is the most permissive, not explicitly banning it. Several companies, such as Meta and YouTube, delegate monitoring to their user communities, via a reporting system used to process an algorithm developed through machine learning of this data and partly through a human supervisory work of so-called deciders who can intervene in a limited number of cases.¹⁷

One example is the option Facebook gives its members to report a post. Regarding the option “what kind of hate speech?” the social network diversifies the options into race or ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, social caste, sexual orientation, gender or gender identity, disability or illness, or other categories.

Walter Lippman introduced the term ‘stereotype’ into social sciences in 1922. Stereotypes constitute a type of ‘mental shortcut’ and a form of economizing thought. While stereotypes are forms of generalization that are neutral in themselves, ‘prejudice’ refers to an innovative and unjustified judgment towards other living beings.

According to Mazzara, stereotyping helps us in some cases to simplify thinking. In dealing with people we need to be able to make assessments about their qualities and possible behavior. This is why we activate a process of inference that leads us to predict the correspondence between certain traits immediately detectable and some hidden subjective characteristics. Though possibly misleading, it is a working framework. The difference lies in the ordinary use of inference and the distorted use in the case of prejudice and stereotyping: that is, when there is a tendency to arbitrarily link objective characteristics and social belonging with personal characteristics.¹⁸ Language is not only a tool for communicating, but also for thinking.

In 1954, American psychologist Gordon Allport¹⁹ proposed a value scale ranking prejudice according to the increasing harm it produces. The first step represents hate speech, that is speaking out against those who are different (ingroup to outgroup) through negative representations (antilocution) by means of stereotypes. The second step is isolation through avoidance where negative representations have become entrenched, turning them into actual prejudice through stigma. The third stage is discrimination, limiting or even denying opportunities in education, employment, social services, and public health. Physical attack is the fourth level of the scale, moving to violent aggression with no return. The tip of the pyramid is extermination, that is, physical elimination by removing all or part of the group of “different” people.

Where hate speech takes place can make a difference. According to Giovanni Ziccardi (2016),²⁰ there are four differences that connote online speech versus offline ‘traditional’ hate speech. The first is permanence: online hate remains active for a long time. The second is the unpredictable return of hate because it can return at any time: hate removed from the web can easily resurface online in a different form or with a different title. Anonymity, along with pseudonyms and fake names is the third feature, because the ability to remain anonymous on the web gives people the (mistaken) feeling that

¹⁷ Pasta, *Razzismi 2.0.*, 149.

¹⁸ Bruno Maria Mazzara, *Stereotipi e pregiudizi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 69-70.

¹⁹ Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Boston: Pearson Addison-Wesley, 1954).

²⁰ Giovanni Ziccardi, *L’odio online. Violenza verbale e ossessioni in rete* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2016).

they can avoid consequences. The fourth is that the transnational nature of online hate speech makes the identification of legal mechanisms to fight hate speech more complex.

Remaining anonymous on the Web is very difficult, though. There are three categories of anonymity:²¹ the perception of anonymity that creates disinhibition; approved anonymity, where data can be made available to authorities if the user violates the rules of the environment; and full anonymity, a very complicated practice that gives total anonymity by acting professionally.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) defines hate crimes as “crimes motivated by prejudice against a particular group within a society”. This is the operational definition used by the Organization in its reports on hate crimes generated by racial and xenophobic hatred (2021), gender-based hatred (2021), anti-Semitic hatred (2019), and anti-Muslim hatred (2018), based on OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 9/09 of December 2, 2009, on combating hate crimes, which was approved by consensus by all member states.

In line with the Ministerial Council decision, a hate crime is not a particular type of crime. It can be an act of intimidation, threats, property damage, assault, murder, or any other crime. The term ‘hate crime’, ‘bias-motivated’, or ‘bias crime’ thus describes a type of crime, rather than a specific crime. A person may commit a hate crime in a country where there is no specific criminal sanction due to prejudice. The term therefore serves as a concept, rather than providing a precise legal definition.

At the European level, the European Union adopted the 2000 Directive Against Ethnic Discrimination: 2000/43/EC, which implements the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, and prohibits any direct or indirect discrimination, harassment, victimization, and any conduct that obliges a person to discriminate against another person. It also provided further extension through 2000/78/EC of November 27, 2000, on equal treatment in employment and occupation irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation.²²

At the Italian level, the main reference is the U.N. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965, ratified in 1975 by Italy. The Mancino Law (no. 205, 1993) extended the legislation by condemning gestures, actions, and slogans related to Nazi-fascist ideology, whose purpose is to incite violence and discrimination on racial, ethnic, religious, or national grounds. Italian law also punishes the use of symbolism related to the aforementioned political movements.

Italy regularly reports data on hate crimes to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Annual reports on hate crimes have been published since 2010. The Observatory for Security Against Discriminatory Acts (OSCAD) carries out activities to prevent, combat, and monitor hate crimes. OSCAD works closely with the National Office Against Racial Discrimination (UNAR), which deals with non-criminal hate incidents and coordinates a permanent consultation group to promote the rights and protection of LGBTIQ+ people. In 2022, according to the OSCE-ODIHR report, in Italy 1,393 hate crimes were recorded by police, including 1,105 racist and xenophobic hate crimes.

This category includes crimes registered in the *Sistema di Indagine* (SDI) database and committed on the grounds of “race”/skin color, ethnicity, bias against Roma and Sinti, nationality, language, anti-Semitism, bias against Muslims, and bias against members of other religions. Regarding the type of hate speech, there were 304 incitements to violence, and 262 threats/threatening behavior²³.

Research in social psychology²⁴ suggests that the phenomenon of group polarization on social media may be partly responsible for forms of extremism, which we often observe on the Internet,

²¹ Pasta, *Razzismi 2.0*.

²² Victoria Guillén-Nieto, *Hate Speech: Linguistic Perspectives* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2023).

²³ OSCE ODIHR, *Italy Hate Crime Report 2022*, hatecrime.osce.org/Italy.

²⁴ Patricia Wallace, *The Psychology of the Internet* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2016).

backed by an apparent absence of a moderate voice. Initially, an individual may have relatively moderate views on a topic. However, after discussing it in a social group with others who lean in the same direction, that individual may move away from the middle ground and into extremism.

Even at the lexical level,²⁵ the language of online hate is constantly evolving, and automatic filters by algorithms may prove to be fallacious. Indeed, one can find words that are now classified in the hate speech category, but on the rhetorical-literal level it is impossible to recognize the provocative intent of the author who, for example, may use terms to denounce the most retrogressive clichés. Words that may be neutral and therefore not obscure according to Facebook’s standards, may instead be used offensively.

The 2015 UNESCO publication ‘Countering Online Hate Speech’ suggests five different strategies to counter hate speech on the Web. One starts with education to empower people to counter hate messages, through media and information literacy to develop media users’ technical and critical skills. Secondly, it focuses on the empowerment of politicians, media practitioners, and opinion leaders to counter hateful expressions for commercial, electoral, and propaganda purposes, reconsidering law intervention, sanctions, and legal measures to formalize online hate crimes in each individual country. Third is to highlight accountability through public discussion and the need for transparency in the management of information and those who disseminate it, and finally, to implement tools for managing hate speech.

The role of the education system is central, as it represents the way through which the citizens of tomorrow are formed for the workplace and institutions. According to Cohen-Almagor (2014),²⁶ we need to develop good digital citizenship, *netcitizenship*, as it is necessary to develop responsible codes of conduct when surfing the Internet to recognize and counter hate speech. “The term ‘Netcitizenship’ means good citizenship on the Internet. It is about developing responsible modes of conduct when surfing the Internet which include positive contributions to debates and discussions, and raising caution and alarm against dangerous Net expressions. Netcitizenship encourages counterspeech against hate speech, working together to provide a safe and comfortable virtual community, free of intimidation and bigotry”.²⁷

To extend the concept, one can take up earth consciousness as described by Morin (2001): *dobbiamo imparare a esserci*,²⁸ we learn to “be there” on the planet. This means learning to live, to share, to communicate, to be in communion. Taking the revolutionary²⁹ concept of interculturality in pedagogy, mass media, journalism and intercultural communication must be the basis of respect for feelings, understanding, listening to what reality (and how this is reinterpreted into the news) tells us, dialogue with and between different cultures, and a place where education for pluralism, legality, and peace is achieved.³⁰

Consideration must be given to the act of understanding and meeting each other through listening and assertiveness, skills that enable people to express their emotions and opinions clearly and effectively without offending or attacking an interlocutor. There is an increasing urgency for media education that comes through the conscious use of language. When thinking, people must strive to reproduce their thoughts by using appropriate words, without offending, without lacking respect, so as not to trigger and fuel conflicts between people. A language act that works and builds encounter and

²⁵ Federico Faloppa, *#ODIO Manuale di resistenza alla violenza delle parole* (Torino: Utet, 2020).

²⁶ Raphael Cohen-Almagor, “Countering Hate on the Internet”, *Annual Review of Law and Ethics*, 22 (2014), 431-443.

²⁷ Cohen-Almagor, “Countering Hate on the Internet”, 436.

²⁸ Edgar Morin et al. (2001), *I sette saperi necessari all’educazione del futuro*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 77.

²⁹ Agostino Portera et al., *Educabilità, educazione e pedagogia nella società complessa. Lineamenti introduttivi* (Torino: Utet, 2007).

³⁰ Maurizio Corte, *Giornalismo interculturale e comunicazione nell’era del digitale* (Padua: Cedam, 2014), 192.

listening is the one that starts from a posture, a willingness to express oneself and at the same time realize how one wants to be with the Other, thus aligning their hearts, minds, and words.

3. Assessing Hate Speech. Evaluation of Users’ Reaction to a Piece of News. The Case of Minister Lollobrigida’s Divisive Statement

The above-mentioned theoretical framework highlighted the importance of specific language acts in online environments, as well as the use of criteria such as appropriateness and respectful behaviors within digital communities. It is also true that hateful messages and responses characterize SM interactions, as this study tries to demonstrate.

3.1 Description and Background of the Case Study

The case study selected for this research is represented by the flow of comments posted by users in the timespan April 19–26, 2023, on digital news outlets related to *Corriere della Sera* and *The Telegraph*. Such comments stem from a public declaration made on April, 18, 2023 by Francesco Lollobrigida, the Italian Minister of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry, member of the national-conservative right-wing party *Fratelli d’Italia* (Brothers of Italy), led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. Such a public communication event represents an instance of political communication, which could be commented in a polarized way by SM users, as this study tries to demonstrate.³¹

The primary source for the original news-content is a video³² showing Minister Lollobrigida’s speech, soon followed by the report issued by the Italian press agency ANSA (*Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata*), which normally serves as basis for news outlets. It is noteworthy to observe that the exact words used in the speech slightly differ; some minor details do not affect the whole discourse nor the explicit mention of “ethnic replacement” under examination, from the text originally shared by ANSA and then published by main Italian newspapers (*La Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Sole 24 ore* etc.)

Some statements reported in the newspapers do not exactly correspond to the video of the Minister’s speech, but were probably stated before or after the video sequence. In particular, references to a) a migration wave that has exceeded objective limits, and b) the importance to incentivized birth rating in order to think about the future of Italy (two themes that are reported in the digital articles) are not present in the video extract, possibly being said shortly before or after.

Before delving into the analysis of comments, it seems worth quoting the full text of the transcript of the Minister’s speech:³³

Birth rates are not being intensified by convincing people to spend more time at home, as some have argued, because then they intensify intercourses. That is not the way. The way is to build welfare policies that allow people to work and have a family; the way is to support young couples to find employment. Regions where there is less welfare see a remarkable population decline compared with other regions. We cannot give in to the idea

³¹ Guillén-Nieto, *Hate Speech: Linguistic Perspectives*.

³² The video is available on the YouTube channel of the newspaper *Il Fatto Quotidiano*.

³³ The English translation is by the author from the original Italian transcription: “Le nascite non è che si intensificano convincendo le persone a passare più tempo a casa, come qualcuno ha sostenuto, perché così si intensificano i rapporti. Non è quello il modo. Il modo è costruire un welfare che permetta di lavorare ed avere una famiglia, il modo è sostenere le giovani coppie per trovare occupazione. Le regioni dove c’è meno welfare vedono il calo demografico molto più importante rispetto alle altre. Non possiamo arrenderci all’idea della sostituzione etnica. Eh, l’idea della sostituzione etnica: vabbé gli italiani fanno meno figli, li sostituiamo con qualcun altro. Non è quella la strada.”

of ethnic replacement. Eh, the idea of ethnic replacement: okay, Italians are having fewer children, we replace them with someone else. That’s not the way.

Moreover, a look at the headings given by some newspapers could enrich the whole framework. Assuming that the mention of “ethnic replacement” is the one appearing in the video, *Corriere della Sera* actually simplifies and partially modifies the meaning of the statement by titling the news as “No to ethnic replacement”; the headline then presents a quotation which does not entirely correspond to the minister’s *verbatim* expression.³⁴ A quotation is also reported in a *La Repubblica* heading with the same ‘errors’ of transcription imputable to the ANSA news release, while in the body of the article a more faithful quotation is reported, although some pieces are missing.³⁵

The words concerning “ethnic replacement” have been in fact accompanied by some relevant paralinguistic facts, firstly the uncertainty expressed by the discourse marker “eh”. At the textual level it is also relevant to observe that the topic of “replacement” is included in a wider context in which positive intervention for the amelioration of national welfare is also invoked. Nonetheless, as often happens in political, media, and SM Discourse, it was the single lexical unit, namely the collocation *sostituzione etnica*, to unleash hell on SM, because it was a strongly connoted collocation.

Briefly reminding the history of such an expression, suffice it to say that is related to the so-called Kalergi plan and to Renaud Camus’ theory of *grand remplacement*, embraced by far-right groups in Western civilization. In a few words, such a conspiracy theory would assume that white people will be soon intentionally replaced by non-white people in Europe and Western civilization in general.³⁶ At the root of the idea are some European political and literary personalities, including Gerd Hosiak (1941–2018), a neo-Nazi Austrian writer, especially known as a Holocaust denier, and Renaud Camus (1946–), a French writer who founded the *Parti de l’in-nocence* (*Party of in-nocence*) in 2002,³⁷ which supported Marine Le Pen and more recently Eric Zémour. Renaud Camus is probably the inventor, linguistically speaking, of the so-called ‘great replacement theory’ in the forms shared by far-right political movements and white supremacy ideology. For these reasons, the expression “sostituzione etnica”, is highly connoted and recognizable as part of the extreme-right vocabulary (see section 5), although retracing its precise genesis is by no means necessary.³⁸

³⁴ The title is: “Lollobrigida: ‘No alla sostituzione etnica, incentivare le nascite’. Schlein: ‘Parole da suprematista’”. (Lollobrigida: ‘No to ethnic replacement, need to incentivize births’. Schlein: ‘Supremacist words’). The reaction is that of Elly Schlein, secretary of the *Partito Democratico* (PD, *Democratic Party*), the main opposition party in the Italian Parliament.

³⁵ The title is: “Lollobrigida: ‘Bisogna incentivare le nascite, non arrendiamoci alla sostituzione etnica’. Schlein: ‘Parole dal sapore di suprematismo bianco’”. The quotation in the text is “Dobbiamo pensare anche all’Italia di dopodomani. Per queste ragioni vanno incentivate le nascite. Va costruito un welfare per consentire di lavorare a chiunque e avere una famiglia. Non possiamo arrenderci al tema della sostituzione etnica”. Differently, *Il Sole 24 ore*, the economic Italian newspaper, reports the almost-exact transcription of the Minister’s actual speech, apart from minor details irrelevant to the overall meaning. We are aware that these philological details have little relevance in the context of journalistic communication, even considering that the person who serves as a headline writer is often a different journalist from the one who writes the article itself. Moreover, the procedures for relaunching a news story from news agencies are well-known. However, for a complete and detailed linguistic analysis, we find it useful to also take a closer look at these more detailed aspects.

³⁶ For a general introduction with further references, see Brian Duignan, “Replacement Theory”, in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/topic/replacement-theory (2024). Accessed June 10, 2024. For criticism and active opposition to such a theory, see www.immigrationforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Replacement-Theory-Explainer-1122.pdf.

³⁷ The party name is explained on the official website as “L’in-nocence – la *non-nocence*, la renonciation ou le refus de la *nuisance*, l’engagement ou l’aspiration à ne pas nuire” (In-nocence – *non-nocence*, the renunciation or refusal of harm, the commitment or aspiration to do no harm) evoking the Latin etymology of the term. www.in-nocence.org, accessed June 10, 2024.

³⁸ For an assessment of such a theory in Italian political discourse, see Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh, “La teoria della sostituzione etnica in Italia: una narrazione razzista e sessista”, *From the European South*, 12 (2023), 105-122.

3.2. *Materials and Methods*

The news of Minister Lollobrigida’s words was first collected in different news media, both in Italian (*La Repubblica*, *Corriere della sera*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*) and in English (*The Telegraph*, CNN, BBC): the corpus used for the linguistic analysis is formed by the flow of comments, focusing in particular on *Corriere della Sera* and *The Telegraph*.

From a quantitative point of view, a total number of 775 comments online from the newspapers’ websites and their related Facebook and X/Twitter comments have been analyzed. Most of the comments have been extracted by means of *Exportcomments.com* (last retrieval, May, 9, 2024). The remaining number of comments (corresponding to a., d., and e. listed below), which were not otherwise available, were manually analyzed from screenshots taken in April 2023, in conjunction with the news. In detail, the analysis includes:

- a. Comments on the *Corriere della Sera* website (53 comments);
- b. Facebook comments on the official *Corriere della Sera* Facebook profile³⁹ (201 comments);
- c. Tweets responding to the news from *Corriere della Sera* (288 comments);
- d. Citations of the news from *Corriere della Sera* within X/Twitter (39 comments);
- e. Comments on *The Telegraph* website (174 comments);
- f. Tweets responding to the news from *The Telegraph* (20 comments).

Although at first glance the corpus is selective and quantitatively unbalanced with regard to the two languages (only e. and f. are in English, while a. to d. are written in Italian), some comparative generalizations could be drawn in an interlinguistic perspective.

3.3 *Discussion and results of the case study*

From our analysis, most comments in Italian bearing disapproving (or even hateful) content are directed towards Minister Lollobrigida, unlike English comments, which never show a direct attack on the Italian Minister. He is addressed as the brother-in-law of Prime Minister Meloni, emphasizing the family ties between the two personalities, also recurring to a nickname (*Lollo dillo a tua cognata* “Lollo, tell it to your sister-in-law”), in some cases labelled as the brother-in-law *par excellence* (*Il cognato di Italia non ne azzecca una* “The Italian brother-in-law doesn’t get one right”). Hate speech is not always uttered by means of direct attacks or use of profanity; rather, it is very often found in innocuous-looking sentences that require subtle irony to catch references and quotations, as the use of the semantic field of replacement (*Io propongo la sostituzione di Lollobrigida ma con chiunque, anche con un pupazzo, sarebbe sicuramente meglio* “I propose replacing Lollobrigida but with anyone: even a puppet would certainly be better”/ *A questo dovrebbero sostituirci il cervello* “this man should have his brain replaced”).

A minor number of hating posts are directed to the government in general, often addressed with the demonstrative pronouns *questi*, ‘these people’, which is marked as a pejorative (*Questi sono indietro di 70 anni, che senso hanno in un mondo globalizzato le parole: sostituzione etnica, sono una madre, sono cristiana, sono italiana ...* “These [people] are 70 years behind, what sense do the words have in a globalized world: ethnic replacement, I am a mother, I am Christian, I am Italian ... ”)⁴⁰. The same

³⁹ *The Telegraph*’s Facebook profile has not been considered for the analysis because the news item had not been shared on this social network.

⁴⁰ The three last expressions refer to Giorgia Meloni’s words first stated in 2019, then rebounded in political and SM contexts.

pejorative use of *questo* is found again in personal attacks to the Minister (*Ancora con la sostituzione etnica, ma questo è proprio fuori* “Again with the ethnic replacement, his man is just off”/ *E questo dicono sia lì per merito!* “And that man, they say, is there on merit!”) also in dialect (*Chist è sciem*, “This man is dumb” in a Neapolitan dialect).

The English comments are mostly directed towards UK politicians and governments, and quite surprisingly, if we compare this information to the Italian original context, concerning Left-wing movements and parties in Europe (*Ethnic replacement was a deliberate Labour policy under Blair, as their own internal documents proved. Many of the culprits are still in Parliament. / He speaks the truth. The Left HAVE TO SHUT HIM DOWN. More and more Europeans are waking up. They can't keep the lid on this for much longer*). However, the picture is less surprising if one thinks of the British internal political context, as witnessed by some comments (*This is happening in UK now, but nobody in power wants to admit it*). Some posts, when allowed by the specific platform (this is the case of comments on the newspaper sites, unlike X/Twitter) are presented as a long argument explaining reasons and flaws of the alleged ethnic replacement theory. Of particular interest are a couple of ironic contents aimed at reversing the perspective (*Of course it's racist to say immigrants might take over a country and implement their culture in place of the natives - and of course that could never happen. Er...what is the history of America, New Zealand, Australia...*). Some disapproval is directed to the newspaper itself (*Yes, why is the Telegraph skewing the facts like this?! Can The Telegraph please define “Hard Right”? Your woke journalists use it all the [time] to describe anybody right of Starmer*).

Linguistic and paralinguistic strategies can be detected and separated. From a linguistic point of view, the use of demonstrative pronouns is of particular interest because it can reveal the othering as well as instance of *we-code* vs. *they-code*.⁴¹ The meaning of such demonstratives is retrievable only by means of the co-text and context, and is generally used in a derogatory sense. Clichés, together with the use of implicit assertions, also belong to the semantic-pragmatic part of linguistic analysis, in this case study concerning fascists, migrants, Muslims, colonization ... Finally, ironic statements are the most difficult to analyze because irony is not always transparent, thus understood by users and sometimes not understandable by the researcher, as in the following comments: *Bravissimo / Esattamente / Bravoooooo / Grande Lollobrigida*.⁴²

4. Education and Pedagogical Competences as Counter-Narrative to Hate Speech

In the background of the major social and cultural transformations that characterize contemporary times, and the role of the media in increasing the risks of perspective distortion of social reality, it is important to recognize that all interpretation of the world and communication with other people takes place within “frames of meaning” that should not be absolutized (as in so-called differentialism or cultural relativism), but neither should they be misunderstood. Cultures exist, but they are neither immutable nor impermeable, and it is

illegitimate to chain the individual to his or her group and culture of origin by denying human beings the capacity for autonomy, which is one of their main characteristics. Each individual, in fact, continually and originally redefines his or her relationship with his or

⁴¹ See Banu Baybars et al., eds., *Discourses and Practices of Othering: Politics, Policy Making, and Media* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023).

⁴² On the understanding of irony, see Aline Vanin et al., “Some Clues on Irony Detection in Tweets”, *WWW 2013 Companion: Proceedings of the 22nd International Conference on World Wide Web* (2013), 635-636.

her culture of origin as a result of [...] the environment (natural, historical, and social) and individual characteristics.⁴³

In other words, pure cultures are an abstraction, and personal and social boundaries constantly change, forcing a rethinking of the identity project. This makes culture a structurally unfinished concept, as it shapes, organizes, and selects the messy original potentialities, which serve as a flywheel in the exploration of the unlimited evolutionary possibilities of symbolic character. Starting from this assumption, identity is generated from various cultural systems, which mark each person’s existence;⁴⁴ not only – or not as much – the elements of the country in which one lives, such as language, the legislative system, the legal system, etc., but also the family, work, school, friendship network, neighborhood, etc., in which a plurality of variables intervene which further characterize and define cultures (such as gender, age, economic status, level of education).⁴⁵ Such cultural systems are also characterized by a set of processes that are, for the most part, acquired – that is, absorbed from birth in the environment in which one grows up – which considerably influence the life of the mind without often being fully aware of their performative, relevant presence. They are tacit cultural assumptions, ideas that are strongly rooted in a specific cultural system that become embedded in mental systems, from where they condition much of cognitive processing.⁴⁶

The demanding task of education is, therefore, on an eminently moral level because it is not only a matter of describing diversity but of fostering coexistence and building relationships that generate mutual respect and recognition rather than exclusion. Recognition, individualization, and inclusion are therefore inseparable; in order to be able to dialogue and communicate effectively with the Other, it is necessary to consider him or her first and foremost as a subject with moral claims,⁴⁷ with a right to self-representation, and not as a member of a static category, as is frequently the case in everyday communication.

The stakes are high, and the banalization of hate and the lack of accountability for being on the Web pose an unparalleled educational challenge. There is a need to educate and educate us in generative communication, which avoids the conformism of common sense; this requires commitment, responsibility, and critical awareness. In a word, it requires competence.⁴⁸ The concept of competence refers to a dynamic set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and indicates mastery assumed in certain professional domains.⁴⁹ In this sense, competence encompasses an organic set of internalized knowledge that is used to interpret and analyze critical and complex situations. Deardorff⁵⁰ believes that personal dispositions represent the starting point on which knowledge and understanding (which includes culture-specific knowledge, but also cultural self-awareness and deep understanding) and specific skills can then be built. On the basis of these three dimensions, the activation of the subject’s

⁴³ Massimiliano Fiorucci, *Educazione, formazione e pedagogia in prospettiva interculturale* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2020), 40. The English translation is by the author.

⁴⁴ Ugo Fabietti et al., *Dal tribale al globale. Introduzione all’antropologia* (Milano: Pearson, 2020).

⁴⁵ Cristina Balloi, “Superdiversity: una prospettiva per le nuove sfide della pedagogia interculturale”, *Ricerche pedagogiche*, 218 (2021), 47-66. See also Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

⁴⁶ Luigina Mortari, *Ricerche e riflettere. La formazione del docente professionista* (Bologna: Carocci, 2009).

⁴⁷ Milena Santerini, *Da stranieri a cittadini. Educazione interculturale e mondo globale* (Milano: Mondadori Education, 2017). See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Books, 1997).

⁴⁸ Marta Milani, “Diversità culturale e odio online: il ruolo della competenza interculturale”, *Orientamenti Pedagogici*, 67.4 (2020), 31-44. Pasta, *Razzismi 2.0*. Agostino Portera, “Comunicazione e competenze interculturali: modelli a confronto e riflessioni critiche”, *Pedagogia e Vita*, 69.1 (2011), 147-164.

⁴⁹ Piergiorgio Reggio, “Competenze interculturali ed esperienza professionale”, in Piergiorgio Reggio & Milena Santerini, eds., *Le competenze interculturali nel lavoro educativo* (Bologna: Carocci, 2014), 17-29.

⁵⁰ Darla Deardorff, ed., *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (London: Sage Publications, 2009).

internal outcomes (adaptability, flexibility, ethno-relative outlook, empathy, etc.) and external outcomes, which consist of the appropriate “situational” behaviors for dealing communicatively (and otherwise) with situations, is possible. Namely, appropriate communication requires that participants in the interaction demonstrate an understanding of expectations about the behavior deemed acceptable in a given situation. Thus, communicators must be able to recognize not only the constraints imposed on their behavior by different sets of rules but also to act out a comparison free of stereotypes, prejudices, and offenses.⁵¹

In this sense, a first competence worth exploring when it comes to outlining a counter-narrative to hate speech is ‘knowing how to interpret cultures’. It means the ability to be able to read words, gestures, and behaviors within a frame of meaning and, most importantly, by stepping out of one’s ethnocentric gaze. Specific features of this competence include elements such as:

- holding up the uncertainty of understanding/incomprehension, suspending judgment, and controlling one’s emotional reactions;
- recognizing the other’s point of view as meaningful, even – and especially – when different or divergent from one’s own. It means not banalizing the other’s position, but searching for its deeper meanings, bringing out the motivations that drive the interlocutor to think in a certain way;
- recognizing differences, yet also looking for elements of similarity and possible convergence. Identifying, beyond even profound differences, common elements is – among other things – an additional important step in the exercise of intercultural competence;
- bringing back different customs and/or habits to known practices, one’s own, thus bringing the unfamiliar back to known situations. Such competence facilitates understanding the thoughts and feelings of others; not to substitute one’s own experience for that of others, but to understand them in depth.

A second macro-competence has to do with the ability to reduce bias, ‘purifying’ one’s point of view from biased prejudiced views. The building of knowledge of reality is based on stereotypes and prejudices, universal and ordinary strategies related to perception, as they rely on the process of categorization.⁵² The latter gives structure to human perception – through the translation of raw stimuli into precisely structured experience – giving it stability. Categories then tend to undergo a process of objectification and reification, which makes them seem like facts with autonomous existence, erasing their social and instrumental origin. Stereotypes, according to Lippmann’s⁵³ (1922) definition, are fixed, impermeable knowledge that organizes representations of social realities, which by their nature are varied, mobile, and difficult to capture. In this way, facts, people, and things end up having their own precise place to which personal habits, tastes, and abilities have adapted; but, above all, individuality as such loses its value because it is disturbing, a source of cognitive ‘noise.’ Moreover, as stated by Allport,⁵⁴ stereotyping occurs when the initial category is enriched with judgments, usually negative. In fact, it operates according to mechanisms of projection and dislocation: negative attributes of the self or group to which one belongs are externalized and perceived as a characteristic of another person or social group, according to a negative perception of the external group that valorizes one’s

⁵¹ Milton Bennett, *Principi di comunicazione interculturale. Paradigmi e pratiche* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2015).

⁵² Chiara Giaccardi, *La comunicazione interculturale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005). Monique Eckmann and Miryam Eser Davolio, *Pédagogie de l’antiracisme: Aspects théoriques et supports pratiques* (Genève: IES Editions, 2002).

⁵³ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1922).

⁵⁴ Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Boston: Pearson Addison-Wesley, 1954).

own. When a stereotype becomes charged with affective and identity values, it becomes emotionally colored, and acquires, in addition to a cognitive function, the ability to guide attitudes and actions; thus, a prejudice is produced. These are *a priori* evaluations that represent images of a social group, minority, ethnic group, etc., in a generalized and simplistic way. The rigidity of stereotypes and prejudices depends not only on their emotional and identity significance but also on the strength of the mechanisms that enable their reproduction; some of them depend on individual cognitive activity, while others are related to language and the dynamics of communication. As for language, on one hand it has the power to categorize reality by activating networks of meanings, with possible attributional distortions, and on the other hand, it represents one of the most important dimensions along which the fundamental processes of social comparison and intergroup differentiation are activated. Media, for their part, build perceptive “normality,” the categories and labels that enter common use, granting them a significant place and prominence.⁵⁵

Therefore, the task of education is to disarm the destructive charge of stereotypes and prejudices by focusing on specific ‘sub-competences’:

- active and participatory listening and, while listening, processing reflective thinking into action. It is not enough to suspend judgment and stand by. It is important to enter the relationship with gentleness and respect and to try to explore the situation, asking questions oriented to better understand, but also to identify traces of potential to be constituted as a support base for an educational intervention strategy. At the same time, it is essential to allow oneself to be questioned by what emerges, to ask questions in order to understand how one can act and, if necessary, to modify one’s action in the process;
- recognizing prejudice and allowing it to emerge. It is a matter of avoiding denial of the problem and recognizing in the situation some forms of prejudice and the possible repercussions. Allowing the prejudice to emerge without obstructing the Other as he or she formulates his or her thoughts is the first step to be taken. Subsequently, however, it is necessary to reveal reality for what it is. Only under these conditions is it then possible to accept the prejudice as the thought of the Other and identify the most appropriate strategies (argumentation, decentering, empathy, etc.) to promote its reduction;
- knowing how to decentralize. Decentralization “consists in bringing out, through introspection and, later, analysis, the frames of reference that the practitioner uses when perceiving and decoding otherness”.⁵⁶ This is only possible through interaction with the Other, who plays the role of the one who allows his or her identity to reveal itself. Its first goal is to capture the personal and professional frame of reference through which the other person is perceived, especially in situations of culture shock; however, the references that emerge should not be perceived as misconceptions to be eradicated, but, on the contrary, as principles that it is important to make explicit. It is through the analysis of these references that one will be able to understand the reading grid and any distortions activated in one’s knowledge paths. The second objective of decentralization is to identify and analyze the so-called “sensitive zones,” that is, the areas in which one struggles most to communicate with the other person, in which misunderstandings are most frequent, misconceptions strongest, and emotions most violent. Recognizing such sensitive zones in fact, allows one to become

⁵⁵ Corte, *Giornalismo interculturale*.

⁵⁶ Margalit Cohen-Emerique, *Per un approccio interculturale nelle professioni sociali e educative* (Trento: Erickson, 2017), 141. See also Margalit Cohen-Emerique, *Pour une approche interculturelle en travail social* (Rennes: Presses de l’EHESP, 2015).

- aware of any prejudices that a person may have and not to allow oneself to be pervaded by emotionality;
- de-culturalizing conflicts and subjectivizing issues. Because not everything can be explained solely by cultural factors and motivations, it is important to refer to the multidimensionality of each person's existence and, therefore, the value of singularity. In addition, it is also necessary to take into account – from an ecological perspective⁵⁷ – the political, social, economic, relational, and individual contexts in which conflicts arise or from which they are generated;
- arguing one's reflections and evaluations. It involves giving reasons for one's beliefs and explanations by referring to facts and experiences rather than theoretical references.

A third macro-competence then concerns the search for shared horizons to promote communication and dialogue functional to the creation of shared planning, recognizing conflicts among people and groups, not so much through formal recall of values and principles, but by activating self-reflexive processes of continuous signification and re-signification of relational dynamics. There is a clear difference between approaching the Other out of a purely cognitive interest and approaching it in a functional way to build a 'space of encounter', understood as a sphere in which it is possible to experience relationships through concrete gestures and shared actions aimed at generating new horizons of meaning. Below are some specifics of the macro-competence in question:

- perceiving and recognizing ongoing (more or less hidden) conflict and the resulting emotional and relational difficulties (anger, lack of understanding of the elements at play, tension, etc). Even where there is no overt conflict, recognition of one's emotional states becomes an opportunity to question the different possible meanings of the relationship for the actors involved;
- recognizing the risk of displacing the problem. Indeed, bringing the conflict or problem back to formal or normative dimensions risks eluding both the heart of the matter and the meaning of what is happening for the actors involved. It is therefore important to embrace and interpret the cultural and personal meanings of the words used by the stakeholder;
- search for and recall past episodes – one's own and those of the people with whom one interacts – to help oneself and others enter a cross-cultural dynamic that activates the relationship between different systems of meaning and values. In this way, gestures, actions, and expressions are contextualized in relation to personal lived experiences;
- seek to propose readings and dialogues that go beyond high-visibility or overly media-laden cultural and/or religious symbols and understand that in the prejudice – one's own and others' – there are the thoughts and experiences that have contributed to forming it and that that prejudice must be joined by personal and meaningful experiences capable of bringing out other possible meanings and values;
- seeking and facilitating convergence, valuing the possibility of understanding among people with different cultural backgrounds.

In sum, even more important than denouncing or removing offensive content is the challenge and educational wager at stake. Citizens – even and especially digital ones – will therefore have to be properly trained as moral agents capable of critical subjectivity through counter speech that is not the symmetrical opposite of hate speech but consists in the pursuit of taking personal responsibility. In

⁵⁷ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Die Ökologie der Menschlichen Entwicklung* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1986).

fact, O’Neill (1990),⁵⁸ without denying the importance of rights, argues that a rights-oriented communication is not always able to make rights a priority: they are important, but to have meaning and effect, they must be placed within a framework of duties, obligations, and commitments. While the rights-oriented approach looks at the position of the beneficiary, the duty-oriented approach looks at relationships from the point of view of the actor, at his or her moral dimension. This means that the duty to formulate clear and hate-free communication comes before the individual’s right to receive such communication.

5. Final Remarks

This study tried to show the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding problems and suggest possible solutions, including legislative support, for a less negative and more conscious use of language in the public sphere. Media Education, Linguistics, and Pedagogy, as three different but interrelated disciplines within human science, could effectively cast new light on a multi-layered and complex phenomenon as SM Discourse nowadays is. Media expertise, together with the linguistic analysis of texts, leads to a fine-grained description of a given social phenomenon, such as hate speech in newspapers and related content, and meanwhile growing awareness paves the way for possible pedagogical interventions.

As for the comparative analysis of hate speech provided by our case study, a first observation concerns the general style of comments: it should be noted that the corpus of comments in Italian is in fact much more infused with hate speech than English discourse. This may depend on several factors, including a cultural constraint related to some idea of politeness. Moreover, the external viewpoint of a British user (or at any rate an English-speaking reader of *The Telegraph*) towards the Italian government might play some role for lesser involvement in the words and their possible consequences, providing that ideological/political leaning could have a role in voicing hate speech instances.

The most relevant result in a comparative perspective concerns the target of hate speech, which appears to be reversed in the two languages: in simpler terms, if the haters in the Italian SM are mainly people of the opposite orientation to Lollobrigida’s, on the contrary in the British news, we register support for statements that appear to relate to the current British situation, especially in main cities.⁵⁹ Therefore, the target of such disapproval (not real hate speech, though) is not the Italian Minister or government, but the left and leftist culture, in general and in Europe.

The discourse of Minister Lollobrigida’s speech has its roots not only in the Italian language but also in the Italian linguistic and cultural environment that has some evident echoes in the Italian addressee, which on the contrary may be not totally transparent to an English addressee. This is far from denying the possibility of translation and understanding a political discourse given in a different language: nonetheless, some linguistic elements could appear as decontextualized, and deprived of their multistratum of connotations.

The lexical choice of a given expression, in our case “ethnic replacement”, appears as a clear self-qualification, because this specific collocation, whether consciously used by the Minister or not, still belongs to an extreme-right universe of words, which intentionally aims to communicate in a certain linguistic way. The party of *Fratelli d’Italia (Brothers of Italy)* has very openly-declared positions on migrations and relationships between native and non-native people in the national territory, and this is

⁵⁸ Onora O’Neill, “Practices of Toleration”, in Judith Lichtenberg, ed., *Democracy and the Mass Media* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1990), 155-185.

⁵⁹ For a recent analysis on political sentiments in Britain, see Huw Davies and Sheena MacRae, “An Anatomy of the British War on Woke”, *Race & Class*, 65.2 (2023), 3-54.

also recognized by the users of the opposite faction (*Il governo Meloni usa un linguaggio tipico dei peggiori gruppi di suprematisti e neonazisti. Complimenti. “Meloni’s government uses language typical of the worst supremacist and neo-Nazi groups. Congratulations”*. Note the ironic use of the final sentence).

Moreover, the impression of this specific case study is that “sostituzione etnica” resembles a semantically semi-empty label, emptied of its deeper meaning connected to the history of the word and the concept, used here for community purposes to express membership of and loyalty to a given political group.⁶⁰

The question in the title of the present paper (“Ethnic replacement”. Unfortunate Expression or Unacceptable Supremacism?) might be actually answered both in a twofold and a negative way: both one and the other, but also neither one nor the other. The answer depends on the awareness of the sender (which may be guessed on the basis of other statements and political affiliation, but never fully defined *a priori*) and the decoding of the addressee, which is affected by language, context, and one’s own ideological orientation.⁶¹

A more in-depth analysis of the corpus created for this study could reveal further insights in order to interpret the multi-faceted nature of comments. Such an analysis could benefit from all the complementary information, which can be inferred from the username, nickname, presentation, use of emojis in presentation and self-description given by the user; however, no hints are present in some cases to detect the real intention of the user in writing a specific post. In particular, identity emojis,⁶² the use of capital letters, users’ names, and multimodal expressions (e.g. adding of photos with famous people laughing or GIFs with endless applause) belong to paralinguistic and paratextual strategies that enable the reader to decode the possible content implicit in the text.

Progressive awareness of such underlying mechanisms of SM interactions could shed new light not only on the resulting communication strategies, but also on possible pedagogical interventions aimed at preventing this delicate phenomenon more effectively.

⁶⁰ Teun van Dijk, “Ideology and Discourse Analysis”, in *The Meaning of Ideology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 110-135.

⁶¹ David Clementson. “How Web Comments Affect Perceptions of Political Interviews and Journalistic Control”, *Political Psychology* 40.4 (2019), 815-836.

⁶² See Sara Luxmoore et al., “Emoji, Language Games and Political Polarisation”, *Fourth Conference on Computational Humanities Research* (Paris, 2023).